

**TALK BY SIR MICHAEL JAY, PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY,  
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**“FOREIGN POLICY AND THE DIPLOMAT: THE END OF THE AFFAIR?”**

The end of diplomacy as we know it has been foretold for well over a hundred years – with renewed vigour with every communications revolution. In 1876 after the invention of the telegraph, Queen Victoria argued against the upgrading of the British legation in Rome to an Embassy, on the grounds that “the time for Ambassadors and their pretensions is past”. In 1919, Paul Cambon, who had been French Ambassador to London for 21 years, and whose son had just been appointed to one of France’s overseas missions, lamented that “every day I regret having allowed my son to choose a dying career...” And there are many more recent examples. “Has the time finally come to sell off the Foreign Office?” asked Andrew Roberts 10 years ago. And “has the Foreign Office had its day?” asked Bronwen Maddox in February this year.

My answer to both these last questions is – it won’t surprise you – no. But I am equally clear that Foreign Ministries will only survive and stay relevant if they adapt to a world and to global challenges that are profoundly different from even 20 years ago.

That foreign policy has changed is incontrovertible. I see three main phases since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war.

- The first was the cold war and the bipolar world that lasted for around 40 years until the late 1980s. This was an era characterised by super power diplomacy, with a more or less stable equilibrium between the US and the Soviet Union, and NATO and the Warsaw pact, guaranteed by the nuclear doctrine of mutually assured destruction, or – in one of our most appropriate acronyms - MAD. At the same time, the fledgling European Community grew into the European Union, and conflict was confined mainly – and with the notable exception of the Middle East – to colonial or post-colonial wars.
- The second was the 1990s, a decade characterised by the response to the collapse of communism in Europe: by the successful process of integrating the countries of East and Central Europe into Western security and political structures, and particularly NATO and the EU; by the process, also broadly successful, of managing the relationship with Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union; and by the far less successful management of the break up of Yugoslavia – of which one of the final stages, the independence of Kosovo, has still to be achieved.
- This second period came to an end with 9/11. The point here is not so much that 9/11 changed everything, though it did of course change a lot; but that those attacks and their aftermath showed that the international framework had shifted

again, to a world which was dominated by one super power, the United States, but in which the challenges were global.

- The communications revolution has brought huge benefits to the world economy and to consumers, but has also enormously increased the ability for terrorists, international criminals and others to operate on a global scale – and they are often far more effective at operating across national boundaries than are nation states, for whom those boundaries, whether physical or judicial, continue to define national sovereignty. At the same time, science and a growing sense of global responsibility has pushed the linked issues of poverty, climate change and environmental degradation towards the top of the international agenda – as we saw at the G8 Summit in Gleneagles last summer.
- And meanwhile, expectations of government have also changed radically – because of the communications revolution, the end of deference, the rise of the consumer-citizen.
- All these developments have profound implications for all government departments, including the FCO: on the priorities we set and how we work.
- And this caused us, in the Foreign Office, to rethink the challenges we faced. And we set them out, in 2003, as a series of strategic priorities for foreign policy over the next five years or so. These priorities were revised in March this year, just before Jack Straw left the Foreign Office, and Margaret Beckett, as one of her first acts, added a more specific priority on climate security.
- These priorities are, I believe, a pretty good summary of the external challenges Britain now faces. I say Britain, not the Foreign Office, because the revised strategy document issued in March this year was discussed in and agreed by Cabinet as a whole as a statement of Britain's external priorities: the Foreign Office's task, working with others, is to focus its resources on them at home and abroad, and deliver them for government as a whole.
- Let me read them to you:
  - making the world safer from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction
  - reducing the harm to the UK from international crime, including drug trafficking, people smuggling and money laundering
  - preventing and resolving conflict through a strong international system: and I stress the importance of both halves of that; conflict prevention and resolution, and the strengthening of the international systems to help achieve it
  - building an effective and globally competitive European Union in a secure neighbourhood

- supporting the UK economy and business through an open and expanding global economy, science and innovation and secure energy supplies
- achieving climate security by promoting a faster transition to a sustainable, low carbon global economy
- promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction underpinned by human rights, democracy, good governance and protection of the environment
- managing migration and combating illegal immigration
- delivering high-quality support for British nationals abroad, in normal times and in crises
- ensuring the security and good governance of the UK's Overseas Territories
- I don't want to go through all of these, you will be glad to hear. But I do want to stress here the growing importance for the FCO at home and abroad of its service delivery work: helping Britons in trouble, delivering a highly complex and innovative visa operation, and, through UK trade and investment, helping British companies trade and encourage foreign companies to invest. In particular, consular work is growing not only in importance but in profile: terrorist attacks, the Tsunami, last year's hurricanes, last week's evacuation from Lebanon. The British Ambassador on the spot is in charge, and reputations are made or broken on how they manage the crisis. Each presents real and difficult challenges; with tough and instant decisions to take under the media spotlight, and with those involved distraught and often grieving. And the broader context is difficult too of getting clarity on what people have a right to expect from government, and what it is not reasonable for them to expect from government. Consular, visa and commercial work is core business for our Ambassadors in a way that was unthinkable even 15 years ago. And training starts early. All policy entrants to the FCO have to spend one of their first two years on consular, visa or commercial work, or on management.
- The list of strategic policy priorities I read out a moment ago is very different from that which would have been drafted 20 years ago. And it is equally clear that we need a different kind of diplomacy to deliver them just as we need a different diplomacy to discharge our consular or visa obligations. In order to show that, let me draw out first some more of the implications – and some of the dilemmas – to which these priorities give rise.
- First, of course, this is not an agenda that Britain can advance on its own. We have to operate through a network of bilateral and multilateral relationships. The most important bilateral relationship is, and under any future Prime Minister I can think of, will remain the United States. Twice in the last century America came to our

aid and restored freedom in Europe. That remains an immensely powerful driver for an enduring relationship. But it is not a straightforward relationship. We differ on more than is often apparent. And the imbalance in political and economic weight will always risk accusations of poodleism – particularly with a Prime Minister who prefers to exert influence privately, not through a megaphone: influence exerted privately is, by definition, invisible, and hard to demonstrate. The crisis in Lebanon is the latest example of this. But I still do not see any other relationship rivalling the intensity of historical, cultural, political, economic and security ties that we have with the US.

- But that leaves our foreign policy with two big challenges. The first is squaring a close relationship with the US with the centrality of our relationship with the EU – which, perhaps rather more controversially, I don't see changing either. I cannot see any government taking us out of a European Union of 25 or more states, many of whom will be natural allies across a range of British interests; and if we are in, I cannot see how we will or should decide not to influence its political and economic development when a strong and competitive EU is needed to meet today's global challenges. And this means that working with the US and working within the EU to ensure a constructive Transatlantic relationship will be a key task for the years ahead.
- There is a second challenge here too: the role of multilateralism and of the international system. Britain has no choice but to pursue its interests through the multilateral organisations to which it belongs: the EU, the UN, in all its manifestations, the G8, the WTO, the Commonwealth, the international financial institutions. The US are, instinctively, more sceptical about this, seeing international institutions as constraining their power and authority rather than, as we do, buttressing them. Here, then, is another role for our diplomacy: working within the UN and other international organisations to show their value not just to us, but to others too, including the US. Two recent examples: the first is the work of our Permanent Representative to the UN, Emyr Jones Parry's earlier this month to get a UN Security Council resolution on North Korea by building a unity of view that few thought existed. As for the second, I myself, in preparing for the G8 Summit in Gleneagles last year, had some of the toughest negotiations of my career with the United States on climate change and Africa: but in retrospect all the G8 countries, including the United States, saw the agreements at Gleneagles as a real advance.
- But at the same time, we need to continue to focus on the reforms of the international institutions so that they are – to coin a phrase – fit for purpose. In many ways they are more effective than 20 years ago – when cold war politics meant most UN Security Council resolutions were vetoed by one side or the other. But there is much still needed, not least to help manage the integration of emerging economies – to-day's rising powers if you like – into the international system. And an international system that is based on co-operation and mutual

understanding. Not on the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction. And that is and will be hard going.

- My point here is that this agenda, the Transatlantic relationship, our European policy, our approach to and reform of the international organisations, will remain at the heart of our foreign policy. It is of course a highly political agenda. It will involve the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers too, pretty constantly. But it will also be at the heart of our diplomacy, requiring effective, professional diplomacy using traditional and tried and tested diplomatic skills.
- Now, my predecessors would all recognise this. These challenges, difficult though they are, are well within the traditional comfort zone of diplomacy. But, as I have said, the wider context is changing. One striking characteristic of the strategic priorities I read out just now is that they are as much about domestic policy as about foreign policy. The interdependence of the two is now very strong. There is almost no foreign policy issue that does not have a domestic dimension, and the reverse is true too. 90% of the heroin on the streets of Britain comes from Afghanistan: so the political stability and economic prosperity of Afghanistan – resting on crops other than the poppy – will have a profound effect on British towns and cities. Effective counter-terrorism liaison in Pakistan and Algeria will have a direct effect on security in London. When Margaret Beckett reached agreement with her Chinese, Russian, French, American and German colleagues on a deal on nuclear issues to put to Iran, the price of fuel oil in Britain fell. And a warmer climate, as we saw in Europe in 2003, and may see again this year, can have a big impact on the health of the elderly.
- These issues are now core issues for our bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, at home and abroad. The result is that our Embassies and High Commissions in 140 countries around the world are not just, or even principally, working for the Foreign Office, but for the government as a whole. They will often include representatives of many government departments, but working under the overall authority – a key point – of the Ambassador. And this is not just true of our big bilateral Missions – Washington, Paris, Beijing, Delhi – or Missions to multilateral organisations, such as to the UN in New York or to the EU in Brussels. There are ten government departments, for example, represented in our High Commission in Kingston in Jamaica, working with the Jamaicans on a counter narcotics programme which has seen a significant decrease in the flow of drugs from Jamaica to the UK, and has in the process increased the professionalism of the Jamaican law enforcement forces.
- Equally, foreign offices in capitals will lose relevance if they are not working hand in glove with other government departments. None of us have the resources any more to duplicate what others do, but we do need to work ever more closely together so that we complement each other. Margaret Beckett has recently appointed a special representative on climate change, focussing on links with our major international partners, and working symbiotically with the Department of

the Environment, the Department for Trade and Industry and others. The FCO, Ministry of Defence and Department for International Development work together on Afghanistan, in London as in Kabul and Helmand province. Denise Holt, the FCO's migration director, has been part of Liam Byrne's project board on the reform of the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate unveiled yesterday. And together with my permanent secretary colleagues in the Treasury and DTI, I have been leading work in Whitehall on the British response to globalisation, and in particular the growing economic and strategic importance of India and China – and gave a presentation to Cabinet earlier this month.

- There is another reason why we need to work more closely with other government departments, the need for more effective engagement with faith and other communities, abroad and at home. A year or so ago I gave an interview to a Bengali language paper in Dhaka in Bangladesh. 24 hours later my e-mail inbox in London was full of comments from the Bengali community in London, many of whom had read it. Another example of the speed of communications across national boundaries, to which governments have to respond. A key task for the FCO is to engage with different faiths and communities abroad, explaining British policy to them, and explaining to London their concerns – and the possible implications of those concerns for our own society. And the FCO needs too to engage more effectively with different communities here in Britain because of the deep interest and concern of some communities about aspects of our foreign policy. This is not straightforward, because other faiths are just as heterogeneous as Christianity. And it is not just a task for the FCO, but is for the whole of government: another global challenge which requires a collective response.
- The extent of the links with other government departments is not work which my predecessors would recognise so easily. This is part of a new diplomacy for a changing world. My predecessors would also, I think, be surprised at the extent to which the FCO in London and our Embassies overseas interact. Our global IT network allows real time communication between London and – say – Beirut, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Washington and New York, so that policy on key issues can be formulated with all those concerned making a real and instant input. It would be inconceivable to-day that our Embassies in the Middle East, or in Iran, or in Rangoon, or in Addis Ababa and Asmara would not be involved in formulating policy in relation to these countries and regions. And just as inconceivable that our Ambassadors in Baghdad, Cairo, Riyadh, Abuja would not be in the front line implementing that policy, or on the front pages of papers, on the radio, on television, advocating it. Far from removing the need for Ambassadors and Embassies, instant communications has, instead, provided us with the opportunity to realise their full potential, probably for the first time, in both contributing to the formulation of policy in capitals, and implementing it on the ground – in private and increasingly in public. For Ambassadors today, like James Watt last week in Beirut, are constantly on the television screens and the airwaves. Which is one good reason why 94% of our Heads of Mission speak the language of the country in which they work.

- A small parenthesis at this point if I may. Some of you may now be saying to yourselves that you may agree with much of this, but is it really relevant when foreign policy is decided anyway by No 10? So let us consider that.
- In a sense, of course, there has long been tension between the Foreign Office and Downing Street: sometimes over policy, sometimes over process, or sometimes a result of a more generalised view from across the road that the Foreign Office tends to see both sides of a question when seeing one is quite enough. That is at least one way of describing Mrs Thatcher's view of the Foreign Office. (I did once ask Mrs Thatcher, when Prime Minister, how she squared her hostility to the Foreign Office as an institution with her admiration for the Foreign Office people with whom she worked closely. "Oh that's perfectly clear," she said. "I trained them myself.") And Prime Ministers have, of course, always taken charge in a major foreign policy crisis – as they should: the Falklands, Afghanistan, Iraq. That is the nature of our system and is true the world over.
- But there has, nevertheless, been a shift towards the centre in recent years, partly because, as I have already argued, foreign and domestic policy are increasingly intertwined, raising cross cutting issues that need to be resolved centrally; partly because of the growth of summitry over the last 15-20 years, with the Prime Minister representing Britain and needing to understand and take charge of the issues; and partly because Presidents and Prime Ministers travel much more than they used to, and foreign policy is inevitably on the agenda when they do. This is a world wide trend, not related particularly to Britain.
- Looked at in another way, where diplomacy and negotiation is at the heart of the issue – for example the Iran nuclear dossier, or negotiation on the future of the Balkans, or reforming the United Nations, then the Foreign Office is firmly in the lead. Where another department is intimately involved, for example DFID on Sudan or the Home Office on migration issues, we set up joint departments. And where the entire government is engaged – our troops on the front line, a difficult diplomatic effort in train, hundreds of million pounds going into reconstruction, the government's reputation on the line – it is quite right that the Prime Minister take the lead.
- But when the Prime Minister is in the driving seat it doesn't mean Foreign Offices are sidelined – at least not in our case. The Foreign Policy team at No 10 is energetic, expert, high quality. It is also small, and consists mainly of people from the Foreign Office. It cannot conduct foreign policy on its own; and it cannot do much at all without constant advice and support from the Foreign Office and from Embassies.
- Let me explain this a little more, taking the present crisis in Lebanon as an example. The Prime Minister has, of course, been hugely engaged – as you would expect. So has the Foreign Secretary, working the phones constantly with Condi

Rice, Tzipi Livni, and her Arab and European counterparts. She was in Rome today. Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells has been in the region – as he should have been. And what of officials? The G8 declaration on Lebanon was masterminded by John Sawers, the Foreign Office political director, who held the pen throughout a day of long negotiation with his political director colleagues in St Petersburg. The final difficulties on the text were resolved by the Prime Minister, negotiating on behalf of his G7 colleagues with President Putin. This was FCO and No10 working as closely together, on a major issue, as is possible. And it is worth remembering that the G8 statement said that “the most urgent priority is to create conditions for a cessation of violence”, and that the Prime Minister said in his statement on the G8 in the House of Commons that “we all want all violence to stop and stop immediately”. This week, a key element in the search for a solution to the crisis is the structure and role of a multinational force. There is no agreement yet on what form it will take, although it will be authorised under a UN mandate. As far as the UK is concerned, the intellectual energy on the options before us has been from the Foreign Office.

- And when, in this as in other crises, the focus switches to New York, it is the Permanent Representative there, and his team, on whom the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary rely to negotiate in Britain’s interest. Just as the Prime Minister relies, as much as does the Foreign Secretary, on our Embassies in Baghdad, Kabul, Riyadh and elsewhere to deliver the government’s policies.
- So let us not focus too much on textual exegesis suggesting differences between Ministers. Let us instead focus on the underlying reality of how foreign policy is actually conducted, at home and abroad, in which the differences between No10 and the FCO are far more apparent than real.
- That is the end of the parenthesis, and I can return to another big change in the conduct of diplomacy: the role, in the jargon, of stakeholders. The FCO, like other foreign ministries, has a long history of contacts and exchanges, sometimes open, sometimes discreet, with the academic world and the foreign policy think tanks. And that was fine for an agenda that was focussed on more traditional foreign policy or security issues. There was much to discuss.
- But it’s different now. The global agenda – climate change, energy security, poverty reduction – can only be delivered with the help of others. Take climate change. Governments must set the political, market and regulatory framework for reducing emissions, but it is businesses who will make it happen: developing, transferring and exploiting new technologies. And NGOs will be increasingly active advocates of a clearer and tougher approach to climate change, as the need for that sinks deeper into the public consciousness. I attended, often with the Prime Minister, many meetings on climate change with business and with NGOs, in the run up to and after the G8 Summit in Gleneagles last year. And that engagement had and will continue to have an impact on our policy both because, as with business and NGOs, they are a necessary part of the delivery of policy; and



because we need the stakeholders to understand better than is sometimes the case the underlying rationale for much of what we do.

- So on climate change, as on other issues, there is a real premium on working together to achieve common goals: but for this to work, governments – and foreign ministries – will need to engage more with others; businesses will need to see the longer term advantages of corporate social responsibility and NGOs to realise that with power and influence comes a need to engage and not just grandstand. And since the issues here are global, and businesses and NGOs are increasingly global, there is an important role here for Foreign Ministries in capitals and Embassies abroad. It is another aspect of a new diplomacy.
- There are other stakeholders too with whom the Foreign Office, again at home and abroad, needs to engage: Parliament, the media, the faith groups that I have already mentioned. The British Council, the BBC World Service – partners in the new world of public diplomacy. We are becoming, and have to become, more porous.
- So where does that leave us? My argument has been that foreign policy is more complex and uncertain, and just as important, as it has ever been. But the challenges are different. The security challenges still grab the headlines, and will continue to do so, but they are only part of to-day's and to-morrow's wider global agenda. Though they are of course linked to that wider global agenda: conflict and poverty; conflict and energy; conflict, poverty and climate change – all are linked.
- And these issues will always be intensely political, and will involve the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of the day and increasingly other Ministers too. And of course there will at times be differences between them, whether of process or substance. It would be odd, and indeed unhealthy in a democracy if that were not so. And of course those differences will sometimes surface. But let us not be mesmerised by them, and ignore the quite fundamental changes in the world of diplomacy, in London and overseas, which underpin the delivery of our foreign policy objectives, whether short or long term.
- Changes, for all of us I suspect, within finite and perhaps diminishing real resources. The switch of resources, for example, to new regional challenges: our staff dealing with Europe will fall by 26% between 2004 and 2009, while our staff dealing with India and China will rise by more than 20% between 2004 and 2007. Our senior staff will reduce by 20% between 2004 and 2008, as we slim down, become more efficient, and allow young talent – and there is a huge amount of it – to rise. To be Ambassador in Burma or Bosnia in your mid 30s is quite motivating. We are far more flexible than we were, not least in the ability to respond to Britons in distress around the globe – from war, terror and natural disasters. And all our staff know that the service delivery agenda – helping British citizens, helping British companies, running a huge visa operation is, along with management, just as important as the big policy issues.

- Let me stress however that that does not mean that the big policy issues are less important: it means the other issues are more important. Phillip Stephens was half-right in yesterday's FT when he wrote that "if the rest of Whitehall needs fewer thinkers and more managers" – on which I won't comment – "the reverse is true of the Foreign Office". He is right that there is more of a premium than ever on original and challenging thought as the world becomes ever complex. I believe that the strategic priorities I outlined earlier provide the basis for that. But implementing them day by day will require judgement and, indeed, creative thought. But Philip is wrong to suggest that that should be at the expense of management or of public service. A modern Foreign Office has to do it all.
- So my conclusion is that we will continue to need a strong core of highly motivated, highly professional people, engaged with and influencing key politicians and others overseas, in their own language; engaged in Britain with others in and outside government, across an ever broader and more complex agenda: negotiating effectively in Britain's interests in multilateral organisations; serving Britain's citizens and business around the globe - and ensuring all this is done with ever more efficiency. This will need new skills as well as the traditional ones. Careers in the future will not be the same as 20 years ago. But I firmly believe that the task and the job of diplomacy is as important and as challenging and as enduring as ever. Yesterday, 3,000 young people, many of them queuing patiently in King Charles Street, and round the block into Whitehall just to get in, visited the FCO on one of our open days for those interested in joining us. There was a terrific buzz about the place. That, in my last week in the Foreign Office, is the best vote of confidence I can imagine for the future.