

## **How has the ‘Global Britain’ idea shaped the United Kingdom’s Hong Kong policy after Brexit in 2020?**

Nemo L. Buschmann, MSc International Relations, LSE  
N.L.Buschmann@lse.ac.uk

---

### ***Abstract***

*This essay asks how the idea of ‘Global Britain’ has shaped the UK’s policy towards Hong Kong after Brexit in 2020 and what effect the ‘Global Britain’ policies have had on Britain’s relations with the EU and US? The central argument of the essay is that the idea of ‘Global Britain’ has provided a guide for the UK’s policies towards Hong Kong in 2020. In doing so, the government has increased clarity about its foreign policy goals and implemented measures consistent with the ‘Global Britain’ ideas, namely promoting the UK as a foreign policy actor independent of the EU, strengthening a positive historical image of the UK and advancing its international image as a ‘force for good’. The UK’s Hong Kong policy could be seen as effective as in particular the decision to grant a pathway to British citizenship for people from Hong Kong with British National Overseas status has helped the government to reach its own goals. In terms of Britain’s interests in maintaining the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ approach, however, the promotion of the ‘Global Britain’ Hong Kong policy logically excluded more effective policy options which could have influenced Chinese behaviour in Hong Kong. The UK’s Hong Kong policy has had the effect, that the EU and the UK have diverged on their positions on China as the UK has adopted a more critical China position in 2020, which aligned the UK closer with the US position on China. This might result in the UK acting in a way that pursues US interests instead of establishing a truly independent Britain. Beyond the UK’s Hong Kong policy, this paper has shown that ideas can significantly shape foreign policy by changing policymakers’ preferences and providing guides for government action.*

# 1 Introduction

In 2020, the UK's policy towards Hong Kong took place in a context of uncertainty for the UK – Britain officially withdrew from the EU on 30 January 2020, pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong challenged the authorities in Beijing, and the US, the UK's 'closest ally'<sup>1</sup>, engaged in a heated great power rivalry with China on several fronts. First and foremost, Brexit has led the UK government to reconsider Britain's place in the world. In 2019 and 2020, the UK government has often referred to the 'vision' and 'ambition' of a 'Global Britain', which has become the central reference point to distinguish post-Brexit British foreign policy from that which occurred during its membership in the EU. This paper understands 'Global Britain' primarily as a foreign policy 'idea' about the UK's position in the world. According to Goldstein and Keohane, 'ideas' can be understood as beliefs held by individuals which influence policy when the 'beliefs they embody provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about goals or end-means relationships'.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, ideas do not only order the world for actors, but also obscure alternatives because 'once an idea is selected, this pathway limits choice because it logically excludes other interpretations of reality'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, ideas are seen as causal pathways that enable foreign policy goals to be reached, but sometimes prevent 'effective' outcomes.<sup>4</sup> This paper asks how the core beliefs, embodied as the 'Global Britain' idea, have shaped the UK's Hong Kong policies in 2020, and what effect the 'Global Britain' policies have had on Britain's relations with the EU and US? An observation of speeches by government officials yields three core beliefs of the 'Global Britain' idea.

The first core belief is that Britain will become more independent in its foreign policy after leaving the EU. This was observable in Prime Minister Boris Johnson's 'Unleashing Britain's Potential' speech on 13 January 2020 when he said, 'We have the newly recaptured powers, we know where we want to go, and that is out into the world'.<sup>5</sup> Equally, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab emphasised enormous opportunities and new foreign policy options with regard to Iran and Hong Kong 'when we leave the EU' in an article titled 'Global Britain is leading the world

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Embassy & Consulates in the United Kingdom, 'History of the U.S.-UK Special Relationship and U.S. Policy', accessed 14 April 2021, <https://uk.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, 'Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework', in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change (Cornell University Press, 1993), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvv4147z.5>, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Goldstein and Keohane, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Goldstein and Keohane, 'Ideas and Foreign Policy'.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Johnson, 'PM Speech in Greenwich: 3 February 2020', GOV.UK, 3 February 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-in-greenwich-3-february-2020>.

as a force for good'.<sup>6</sup> The second core belief is that today's British foreign policy should be guided by an idealised notion of British history. This was evident when Johnson said, 'to think of our past and go up a gear again, to recapture the spirit of those seafaring ancestors' who brought 'not just riches but something even more important [...] – a global perspective'.<sup>7</sup> The third belief is that Britain is an exceptional and 'good' country. This was most apparent when Dominic Raab wrote 'we intend to reinforce Britain's role in the world as a good global citizen' [...] 'and Britain will be a force for good'. Additionally, Raab's introduction to the Queen's speech in January 2020 concluded on Global Britain that 'we will use our moral compass to champion causes that know no borders'.<sup>8</sup>

The central argument of the essay is that the idea of 'Global Britain' has provided a guide for the UK's policies towards Hong Kong in 2020. In doing so, the government has increased clarity about its foreign policy goals and implemented measures consistent with the 'Global Britain' ideas, namely promoting the UK as a foreign policy actor independent of the EU, strengthening a positive historical image of the UK and advancing its international image as a 'force for good'. At the same time the promotion of 'Global Britain' internationally through the UK's Hong Kong policy logically excluded other interpretations, which meant that alternative and possibly more effective policy options which could have influenced Chinese behaviour in Hong Kong were not conceived. Moreover, as a consequence of the UK's Hong Kong policy, the EU and the UK have diverged on their positions vis a vis Hong Kong and China, with the UK adopting a more competitive position toward China in 2020.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, this newfound independence from the EU may simply result in a closer alignment with the US and see the UK acting in a way that pursues US interests instead of establishing a truly autonomous Britain as hoped for by proponents of the 'Global Britain' idea. The first part of the paper examines UK's policy making toward Hong Kong in 2020 and how the 'Global Britain' core beliefs have been reflected in it. The subsequent part examines what functions the UK's Hong Kong policy has had on the international stage, particularly in regard to British relations with the EU and the US. The paper proceeds with a brief introduction to UK-Hong Kong relations.

---

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Raab, 'Global Britain Is Leading the World as a Force for Good: Article by Dominic Raab', GOV.UK, 23 September 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/global-britain-is-leading-the-world-as-a-force-for-good-article-by-dominic-raab>. [accessed: 18 April 2021]

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, 'PM Speech in Greenwich'.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Raab, 'Foreign Secretary's Introduction to the Queen's Speech Debate', GOV.UK, 13 January 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-introduction-to-queens-speech-debate>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>9</sup> See Magnus Obermann, 2021, "Shifting the post-Brexit alliances? Britain's China policy between American fervour, European ambiguity, and global British ambition", BRIFPO Paper, London: LSE European Foreign Policy Unit.

## 2 From British colonial rule to autonomous Hong Kong

The UK has long lasting historical ties with Hong Kong. As a consequence of the opium wars in 1842 and 1860, China had to cede Hong Kong to the British Empire and agree to a 99-year lease of the Hong Kong territory to Britain in 1898. Historical academic accounts of the UK-Hong Kong relationship shed light on this period by examining, for instance, migration policy,<sup>10</sup> the strategic value of Hong Kong,<sup>11</sup> and the riots of 1967.<sup>12</sup> After almost 100 years of colonial rule, *The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong* (Joint Declaration) was signed in 1984 managing the handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>13</sup> Decolonization and postcolonial scholarship have researched the handover process and how it has influenced recent protest movements.<sup>14</sup> The Joint Declaration promised Hong Kong a 'high degree of autonomy', an unchanged socio-economic order for 50 years, and the continuation of existing personal freedoms and rights as enshrined in Hong Kong's Basic Law.<sup>15</sup> The UK's administration over British Hong Kong ended on 30 June 1997, and Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the PRC.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1997, Britain has sought to balance its Hong Kong policy between pragmatism (policy based on the Joint Declaration between the UK and China) and idealism (responding to changes in Hong Kong that endangered gradual democratisation).<sup>17</sup> The British Parliament believes the UK has a 'moral and political obligation' to ensure that China respects the Joint Declaration and the agreements it entails. To assess this, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office publishes a report on Hong Kong to Parliament biannually.<sup>18</sup> However, it has been pointed out that the

---

<sup>10</sup> Florence Mok, 'Chinese Illicit Immigration into Colonial Hong Kong, c. 1970–1980', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 30 November 2020, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1848402>.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua-John Tian Ser Seah, 'Imperial Outposts and the War Beyond: Singapore, Hong Kong and the British Empire's Land Force Contribution to the Korean War', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2017, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Valeria Zanier and Roberto Peruzzi, '1967 as the Turning Point in Hong Kong–British–PRC Economic Relations', in *China, Hong Kong, and the Long 1970s: Global Perspectives*, ed. Priscilla Roberts and Odd Arne Westad (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 233–55, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51250-1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51250-1_10).

<sup>13</sup> Louisa Brooke-Holland, 'Hong Kong: The Joint Declaration', 2019, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8616/>.

<sup>14</sup> Wing Sang Law, 'Decolonisation Deferred: Hong Kong Identity in Historical Perspective', *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong: Localism after the Umbrella Movement*, 1 January 2017, 13–33, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207971-1>.

<sup>15</sup> Brooke-Holland, 'Hong Kong: The Joint Declaration'.

<sup>16</sup> BBC, *BBC on Hong Kong Handover 1997*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amjPt8X1JbA>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>17</sup> Tim Summers, 'British Policy toward Hong Kong and Its Political Reform', *Issues & Studies* 52, no. 04 (December 2016): 1650013, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1013251116500132>.

<sup>18</sup> Select Committee on Foreign Affairs Tenth Report (2000), Hong Kong, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmfaaff/574/57410.htm> [accessed: 18 April 2020].

Joint Declaration does not explicitly state a legal responsibility of the UK to Hong Kong,<sup>19</sup> which is why the British government speaks of an ‘obligation’ instead.<sup>20</sup> Politically, the ‘degree of autonomy’ has become the main point of contestation between the Chinese central government in Beijing and large pro-democracy parts of Hong Kong’s population.<sup>21</sup> In 2003, Hong Kong saw its first mass protests since the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1997. Thousands of people demonstrated against the HKSAR government over a proposed security bill under Article 23 of the Basic Law, which would criminalise subversion against the Central Government.<sup>22</sup> Then in 2014, the ‘Occupy Central’ initiative blocked Hong Kong’s business district for 79 days and the student-led ‘Umbrella Movement’ organised mass demonstrations to demand fully democratic elections<sup>23</sup>. In 2019, demonstrations began to protest a law which would allow extraditions to the mainland and was seen as a way of exposing democracy activist to Chinese authorities.<sup>24</sup> The protests escalated into unprecedented violence, including several deaths in relation to the protests. Since that time, the movement has evolved into a general resistance to PRC violations of Hong Kong’s democracy and autonomy. This led to a landslide victory of pro-democracy politicians in the HKSAR District Council’s elections in late 2019.<sup>25</sup> In response to these events in 2019, China enacted the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) on 30 June 2020 ensuring Beijing’s jurisdictional authority over matters of ‘national security’, such as crimes of secession, subversion and terrorism, which is aimed at preventing new protests.<sup>26</sup> In general, the UK government has taken positions sympathetic to the protest movements.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Serhan Yasmeeen, What Is Britain’s Responsibility to Hong Kong?, *The Atlantic*, 17 June 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/britains-responsibility-to-hong-kong/594142/> [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>20</sup> Louisa Brooke-Holland, Hong Kong: The Joint Declaration,

<sup>21</sup> Tai-lok Lui, Stephen W. K. Chiu, and Ray Yep, *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Hong Kong* (Routledge, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Lui, Chiu, and Yep, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> BBC News, ‘Hong Kong Protests: Timeline of the Occupation’, *BBC News*, 11 December 2014, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30390820>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>24</sup> BBC News, ‘The Hong Kong Protests Explained in 100 and 500 Words’, *BBC News*, 28 November 2019, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49317695>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>25</sup> BBC News, ‘Hong Kong Elections: Pro-Democracy Groups Makes Big Gains’, *BBC News*, 25 November 2019, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50531408>.

<sup>26</sup> BBC News, ‘Hong Kong Security Law: What Is It and Is It Worrying?’, *BBC News*, 30 June 2020, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>27</sup> Tim Summers, ‘Britain and Hong Kong: The 2019 Protests and Their Aftermath’, *Asian Education and Development Studies* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (1 January 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-09-2020-0205>.

### 3 Britain's idealistic Hong Kong policy-making in 2020

#### *Britain's gradually shifting stance on Hong Kong*

Following the events that took place in Hong Kong in 2020, the UK has gradually shifted away from its previously held pragmatic position on Hong Kong, which had given greater importance to strong (economic) relations with China<sup>28</sup>, and instead has adopted a more idealistic position, which questions China's adherence to the Joint Declaration and supports the democracy movement. Until mid-2020, the British government's reactions to developments in Hong Kong, such as arrests of opposition individuals and the proposal of the NSL by the Chinese National People's Congress on 28 May 2020,<sup>29</sup> were still guided by the hope for 'meaningful political dialogue' as expressed on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint Declaration in December 2019.<sup>30</sup> However, public pressure was mounting and there was considerable lobbying to react in a more determined way. For instance, an article in *The Times* in February 2020 called for 'defining what Global Britain means in practice' with explicit reference to Hong Kong.<sup>31</sup> Further, influential Members of Parliament such as Alister Carmichael, a Liberal Democrat and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hong Kong, demanded in the same newspaper that 'we can no longer ignore human rights abuses in Hong Kong'.<sup>32</sup> In a last attempt at political dialogue to change China's NSL proposal, Prime Minister Johnson published a newspaper article on Hong Kong in the *South China Morning Post* in Summer 2020. He announced that if China were to impose the NSL, Britain would change its visa arrangements for people with the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status and ended the article by calling for cooperation with China on the future of Hong Kong.<sup>33</sup> The UK's government serious concerns over the situation in Hong Kong, but also its continued hope for a solution based on political dialogue between

---

<sup>28</sup> Summers, Britain and Hong Kong, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Hong Kong Protests: Foreign Office Statement, 18 April 2020', GOV.UK, accessed 24 February 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kong-protests-foreign-office-statement-18-april-2020>; Dominic Raab, 'China's Proposed National Security Law for Hong Kong: Foreign Secretary's Statement to Parliament', GOV.UK, 2 June 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-statement-to-parliament-on-hong-kong>. [accessed: 18 April 2021]

<sup>30</sup> Dominic Raab, 'Sino British Joint Declaration: Foreign Secretary's Statement on the 35th Anniversary', gov.uk, 19 December 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-statement-on-the-sino-british-joint-declaration>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>31</sup> Roger Boyes, 'We Need to Define What Global Britain Means in Practice — and Fast', 31 January 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-need-to-define-what-global-britain-means-in-practice-and-fast-hgg3dgm7d>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>32</sup> Alister Carmichael, 'We Can No Longer Ignore Rights Abuses in Hong Kong | Comment | The Times', 25 February 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-can-no-longer-ignore-rights-abuses-in-hong-kong-pvs0g2xkt>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>33</sup> Boris Johnson, 'For Hongkongers Fearing for Their Way of Life, Britain Will Provide an Alternative | South China Morning Post', 3 June 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3087252/hongkongers-fearing-their-way-life-britain-will-provide-alternative>.

the parties involved, was also reflected in the Foreign Office's 46<sup>th</sup> biannual report on Hong Kong, published on 11 June 2020 shortly before the imposition of the NSL, which recognised the 'political nature of the concerns' of the demonstrators in Hong Kong. The report further states that 'dialogue and reconciliation' between all the parties involved is the way to overcome the underlying tensions and to achieve a resolution in Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup>

### *The BN(O) decision and reactions after the enactment of the NSL*

After the enactment of the NSL on 1 July 2020, the UK mainly abandoned expectations for political dialog on Hong Kong with China, which marked the final departure from a position leaning towards pragmatism. In Parliament, the UK's Foreign Secretary declared that the NSL presented 'a clear and serious breach of the Joint Declaration'.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, the government announced it would grant BN(O)s 'leave to remain' status in the UK, including the right to work and the ability to apply for settled status in the UK after 5 years with eligibility for citizenship after a further 12 months. Up to 5.4 million Hong Kong residents (70% of the population) are eligible and estimates suggest that up to 300,000 Hong Kong people could immigrate to the UK in the next five years, although the numbers vary widely.<sup>36</sup> In 2020, the UK was the chosen destination for Hong Kong activists to escape oppression and numbers of people seeking asylum spiked. As of 31 January 2021, around 7,000 people have sought settlement using the BN(O) arrangements.<sup>37</sup>

Raab justified Britain's unique BN(O) decision<sup>38</sup> with the 'unique circumstances we face and in light of our historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong'<sup>39</sup>. Similarly, when Johnson proposed the arrangement in June, he stated that the UK has 'no choice but to uphold our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong'<sup>40</sup>. When the new visa rules officially came into force on 31 January 2021, UK's Prime Minister and Home Secretary

---

<sup>34</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Six-Monthly Report on Hong Kong: July to December 2019', 11 June 2020, p. 5; p. 15, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/six-monthly-report-on-hong-kong-july-to-december-2019>. [accessed: 18 April 2021]

<sup>35</sup> Dominic Raab, 'National Security Legislation in Hong Kong: Foreign Secretary's Statement in Parliament', GOV.UK, 1 July 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-statement-on-national-security-legislation-in-hong-kong>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>36</sup> BBC News, 'UK BNO Visa: Can Hong Kong Residents Now Live in the UK?', *BBC News*, 1 February 2021, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-55825479>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>37</sup> Financial Times, 'UK Visa Offer to Hong Kongers Fails to Help Thousands Wanting to Flee | Financial Times', accessed 24 February 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/c66d7bb6-6f1d-42be-9c2d-6787db055900>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>38</sup> Summers, 'Britain and Hong Kong', 6.

<sup>39</sup> Raab, 'National Security Legislation in Hong Kong'.

<sup>40</sup> Boris Johnson, 'PM Boris Johnson Article on Hong Kong: 3 June 2020', GOV.UK, 3 June 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-boris-johnson-article-on-hong-kong-3-june-2020>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

Priti Patel lauded them by stating that ‘Global Britain will always stand up for what is right and uphold our commitments’ as well as commenting that they were ‘immensely proud’ to stand up for ‘freedom and autonomy’.<sup>41</sup>

The government’s BN(O) decision was widely supported by the British press and enjoyed public approval of over 50 percent in Summer 2020.<sup>42</sup> Some of the UK’s most read newspapers empathised with the government’s Hong Kong policy and framed the narrative as ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ and characterised Britain as a force for good. On 1 June, *The Daily Mail*, published an article titled ‘Hong Kong falls to the secret police’<sup>43</sup> and in a separate piece on 3 June, the paper described China’s diplomatic response as ‘Now Britain feels the Dragon’s roar’.<sup>44</sup> Equally, the online edition of *The Mirror* ran a headline on the same day stating, ‘Boris Johnson intervenes in Hong Kong [...] in response to China’s recent crackdown’.<sup>45</sup>

Keir Starmer, the leader of the opposition, supported the government’s actions but also went further by calling for imposing sanctions on Chinese officials who have been involved in human rights abuses.<sup>46</sup> This was supported by the APPG and by the NGO ‘Hong Kong Watch’<sup>47</sup>, which acted as a strong lobby for the democracy movement in Hong Kong. However, the Johnson government has resisted those calls even after another called breach of the Joint Declaration due to the dismissal of pro-democracy lawmakers from Hong Kong’s Legislative Council on 11 November 2020. Foreign Secretary Raab only ‘carefully considered sanctions’ (yet he decided against it) and emphasized instead the UK’s leading international role for standing up for the people of Hong Kong and holding China to its obligations.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Boris Johnson and Priti Patel, ‘Hong Kong BN(O) Visa: UK Government to Honour Historic Commitment’, GOV.UK, 31 January 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kong-bno-visa-uk-government-to-honour-historic-commitment>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>42</sup> Redfield & Wilton Strategies, Support for Welcoming Hong Kong BNOs to the UK Remains Consistently High, <https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/support-for-welcoming-hong-kong-bnos-to-the-uk-remains-consistently-high/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>43</sup> Brown, L. (2020). Hong Kong falls to the secret police. *The Daily Mail*. July 1, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, L. (2020). Now Britain Feels the dragon’s roar. *The Daily Mail*. July 3, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Partick Daly, ‘Boris Johnson Intervenes in Hong Kong Crisis to Offer Path to Citizenship for 2.8m People - Mirror Online’, *Mirror.Uk*, 3 June 2020, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/boris-breaks-silence-hong-kong-22129361>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>46</sup> Cowburn, ‘China: Keir Starmer Urges Boris Johnson to Impose Human Rights Sanctions. The Independent’, 20 July 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/china-keir-starmer-sanctions-boris-johnson-hong-kong-security-law-raab-a9628361.html>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>47</sup> Hong Kong Watch is an independent NGO, whose founder is deputy Chairmen of the Conservatives Party’s Human Rights commission. Members include MP’s, former cabinet members and the former Governor of Hong Kong, Lord Chris Patten. According to its website, HKW monitors the situation in Hong Kong, regularly updates Parliamentarians, government officials and the media, including large campaigns in 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Rhoda Kwan, ‘UK Foreign Minister “carefully Considering” Options for Sanctions against Hong Kong Officials’, *Hong Kong Free Press HKFP*, 29 September 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/09/29/uk-foreign-minister-carefully-considering-options-for-sanctions-against-hong-kong-officials/>. [accessed: 18 April 2020].

Other measures in response to the enactment of the NSL included an extension of the UK's arms embargo on 20 July 2020 to include subjecting Hong Kong to transit control for dual-use goods that could be used for internal repression.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the UK suspended its extradition treaty with Hong Kong because the NSL allows Chinese authorities to influence court decisions in Hong Kong.<sup>50</sup> In Parliament, Raab outlined that the UK 'will continue to take a leading role in engaging and coordinating our actions with international partners, as befits our historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong' and told Parliament that 'a number of international partners' would consider 'offers' to people of Hong Kong, following the UK BN(O) decision.<sup>51</sup> Finally, the 47<sup>th</sup> report to Parliament on Hong Kong published on the 23 November 2020 called out the two breaches of the Joint Declaration and justified the Foreign Office's response to the developments in Hong Kong on the basis of shared values. In general, it presented the UK as a defender of the rights of the people of Hong Kong and concluded that the UK will continue an approach rooted in its values.<sup>52</sup>

#### *A normative Hong Kong policy ?*

The UK's Hong Kong policy in 2020 sought primarily to protect the people of Hong Kong from China's repressive behaviour, which was most clear in the decision to change visa arrangements for BN(O)s. The justifications for the UK's policy measures clearly reflected the core beliefs of 'Global Britain', for instance, when Raab spoke of the UK's 'leading role' and Johnson honoured the 'ties of history'<sup>53</sup> reflected in the new BN(O) arrangements. Further, the government's self-image of being a 'force of good' was portrayed in the media as the UK standing up against oppression by China.

However, as it was rightly pointed out, Britain's Hong Kong approach has had almost no effect on Beijing's behaviour in Hong Kong, and China continues to transform the 'One China, Two Systems' approach in Hong Kong to its favour.<sup>54</sup> Further, London was also said to lack a strategic approach how to really uphold the 'One Country, Two Systems' given the change in

---

<sup>49</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'UK Arms Embargo on Mainland China and Hong Kong', GOV.UK, accessed 14 April 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-arms-embargo-on-mainland-china-and-hong-kong>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>50</sup> Dominic Raab, 'Hong Kong and China: Foreign Secretary's Statement in Parliament, 20 July 2020', GOV.UK, 20 July 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hong-kong-and-china-foreign-secretarys-statement-in-parliament>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>51</sup> Raab.

<sup>52</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Six-Monthly Report on Hong Kong: January to June 2020', 23 November 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/six-monthly-report-on-hong-kong-january-to-june-2020>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>53</sup> Johnson and Patel, 'Hong Kong BN(O) Visa'.

<sup>54</sup> Summers, 'Britain and Hong Kong', 8.

international circumstances 23 years after the handover, in which China has become more determined to follow its own policies on Hong Kong.<sup>55</sup> Paradoxically, the UK government has justified its policies with historical commitments, while China is justifying seeking unification with Hong Kong also due to its historical ties, a position the UK fundamentally rejects.<sup>56</sup> For China and the UK, the historically reinforced imaginations of links to Hong Kong will make it more difficult to come to a common ground on the future of Hong Kong without one side losing face.

In short, in the UK's Hong Kong policy the 'Global Britain' idea primarily propelled the UK's image of the protector of the people of Hong Kong due to its historical ties, its need to act in a 'good' way by helping oppressed people, which also allowed the UK to take the lead in an international issue. Simultaneously, 'Global Britain' reduced the number of conceivable policy options. For instance, it did not give clarity of how to actually guarantee democratic principles in Hong Kong in the face of an ever-stronger China. Therefore, the UK's measures were predominantly concerned with its own ability to act in its own jurisdiction – adjusting immigration rules, banning exports, and stopping extraditions. As such, the UK's policies did neither directly target China nor were actual costs imposed on China. Although the measures did indeed have an effect on the situation, they only indirectly influenced China's decision making and did not seem to have changed China's behaviour. From the UK policymakers' perspective, the measures taken by Britain in 2020 were the only logical options consistent with the 'Global Britain' idea. 'Global Britain' prevented sanctions from being an alternative measure, as it would not promote the 'leading role' of the UK as shown with a unique BN(O) decision and because it would have likely come with economic costs for the UK amid the Brexit chaos. The international promotion of the 'Global Britain' core beliefs through the UK's Hong Kong policy leads to the question of what effects this has had with regard to the UK's relation with the US and the EU, which will be explored in the next section.

---

<sup>55</sup> Tim Summers, 'What Should the UK Do About Hong Kong?', 28 May 2020, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/05/what-should-uk-do-about-hong-kong>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>56</sup> Jinping Xi, 'Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous - Speech the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China', 17 December 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi\\_Jinping's\\_report\\_at\\_19th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress.pdf](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf). [accessed: 18 April 2021].

## 4 The international effects of the UK's Hong Kong policy

### *Effects on relations with the EU*

Post-Brexit, the UK sought to formulate its own foreign policy independent of the EU and wished to avoid direct foreign policy coordination with the EU, including on the issue of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the UK sought indirect coordination with the EU through the E3 format (UK plus France and Germany). The importance of this coordination for the UK was evidenced by a NATO meeting in November 2019, when the UK Foreign Secretary separately meet with his E3 counterparts to discuss Hong Kong. The three countries also exchanged high level visits in Summer 2020 to discuss Hong Kong.<sup>57</sup> In addition to coordinating positions directly with the EU's two largest member states, it can be assumed that the aim of the UK's coordination with Germany in particular, which held the EU Council presidency in summer of 2020, was to influence the EU's collective response to the enactment of the NSL.

The EU Council's Conclusions indicated a general alignment with the UK's concerns about the developments in Hong Kong, as the EU called the developments in Hong Kong a 'matter of grave concern' and not 'in conformity' with China's international commitments, including the Joint Declaration.<sup>58</sup> The EU member states also provisionally agreed on additional measures, such as considering the impact of the NSL on their visa rules and reviewing their extradition treaties.<sup>59</sup> Some member states such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands implemented the Council Conclusions swiftly, and adopted most of the UK's other measures, except for the BN(O) decision. They also backed Britain's UN initiatives and raised critical voices on Hong Kong during visits of the Chinese Foreign Minister in Summer 2020.

However, the EU adopted a noticeably softer tone towards China as compared to that of the UK, saying it 'expects' that rights and freedoms in Hong Kong are guaranteed.<sup>60</sup> The EU members that did not support the UK's UN initiatives (e.g., Italy and Spain) also avoided criticizing China's behaviour during visits of Chinese representatives in 2020.<sup>61</sup> The fact that

---

<sup>57</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, 'Joint statement by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany and Poland) - Jean-Yves Le Drian, Heiko Maas and Zbigniew Rau', Auswärtiges Amt, 15 October 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/weimarer-dreieck/2405714> [accessed: 18 April 2021]; Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'European Foreign Ministers Meet to Discuss Iran', GOV.UK, accessed 14 April 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/european-foreign-ministers-meet-to-discuss-iran>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>58</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on Hong Kong', 24 July 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45225/st09872-re01-en20.pdf>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>59</sup> Council of the European Union.

<sup>60</sup> Council of the European Union.

<sup>61</sup> Otto Lanzavecchia, 'Italy Stands up for Hong Kong, Foreign Minister Di Maio Tells China - Formiche.Net', 25 August 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/08/italy-stands-up-hong-kong-foreign-minister-di-maio-china/>;

Britain held no bilateral consultations with Italy, which had signed a bilateral cooperation agreement over China's Belt-and-Road initiative,<sup>62</sup> and Spain, which sees China as a key partner,<sup>63</sup> suggests that the UK did not seek to discuss Hong Kong with countries that are less critical of China. Also, there is also no evidence that European countries adapted their visa rules in regard to Hong Kong in a similar way to the UK, as Raab had hoped. Like the UK, the EU did not impose sanctions over Hong Kong because the EU did not view sanctions as a solution to its problems with China nor did the EU wish for the developments in Hong Kong to endanger the Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI).<sup>64</sup>

The UK's coordination with the E3 guaranteed EU support for the UK's position on Hong Kong in the short term. However, the EU did not join the UK's increasingly critical position on China as soft criticism of several EU countries and the moderate implementation of the measures showed. Global Britain's core belief in pursuing independence in foreign policy logically excluded options that would have sought broader coordination with the EU, with which more EU member states might have joined a more critical China position. Furthermore, the conclusion of CAI that the EU was negotiating with China at the time was a main goal of Germany's EU-Council presidency, and therefore neither Germany nor the EU sought sanctions against China over Hong Kong that might jeopardize concluding the agreement.<sup>65</sup> The conclusion of CAI between the EU and China on 30 December 2020 shows the limitation of the UK's aspired leadership on the international coordination on Hong Kong. Without EU membership, the UK was not on a position to influence the negotiating process of the CAI which might have been a leverage on China over Hong Kong.

---

[accessed: 18 April 2020]. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, 'Meeting between Minister for Foreign Affairs and Director of Central Foreign Affairs Commission of Chinese Communist Party, Yang Jiechi', 3 September 2020, [http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/en/SalaDePrensa/NotasdePrensa/Paginas/2020\\_NOTAS\\_P/20200903\\_NOTA131.aspx](http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/en/SalaDePrensa/NotasdePrensa/Paginas/2020_NOTAS_P/20200903_NOTA131.aspx). [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>62</sup> BBC News, 'Italy Joins China's New Silk Road Project', *BBC News*, 23 March 2019, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47679760>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>63</sup> Mario Esteban and Ugo Armanini, 'Spain-China Relations and COVID-19: The Bright and Dark Sides of a Necessary Partnership for Spain - Elcano', 6 May 2020, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/zonas\\_in/ari62-2020-esteban-armanini-spain-china-relations-and-covid-19-bright-and-dark-sides-necessary-partnership-for-spain](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari62-2020-esteban-armanini-spain-china-relations-and-covid-19-bright-and-dark-sides-necessary-partnership-for-spain). [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>64</sup> Jacopo Bargazzi, 'Borrell: China's Move in Hong Kong Doesn't Endanger Investment Deals', *POLITICO*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/josep-borrell-chinas-move-in-hong-kong-doesnt-endanger-investment-deals-eu-trade-business-national-security/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>65</sup> Hans von der Burchard, 'Merkel Pushes EU-China Investment Deal over the Finish Line despite Criticism', *Politico*, 29 December 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-china-investment-deal-angela-merkel-pushes-finish-line-despite-criticism/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

Finally, the EU's decision (led by Germany as Council president) to prioritize its economic interest with China vis a vis the CAI over a more critical response to China's encroachment of Hong Kong's autonomy ultimately suggests that the EU and the UK have diverged in their position on China with regard to Hong Kong. Whether this divergence will remain largely depends on the future of the CAI, which has been called into question particularly after the EU sanctioning of China over the treatment of the Uighurs in early 2021.

### *Effects on relations with the US*

The UK's Hong Kong policy has been linked to another factor of international uncertainty – the emerging great power rivalry between the US and China. It was already anticipated that regardless of the US election outcome in 2020, US policy towards China was unlikely to change substantially due to a bipartisan consensus to contain China.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, the focus of the US defence strategy has shifted, calling China a 'strategic competitor' and emphasising great power competition instead of counterterrorism.<sup>67</sup>

The pressure from the international system due to the increased great power rivalry had tangible impact for the UK. In 2020, the UK has become increasingly concerned about being too dependent on China, especially in consumer technology and pharmaceuticals,<sup>68</sup> as suggested by a report from a conservative thinktank that received widespread recognition in the UK's media.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, the US is Britain's top trading partner, accounting for roughly 15 percent of UK exports in the first six months of 2020<sup>70</sup> and is essential for British security – from intelligence sharing to technology of nuclear missiles.<sup>71</sup> The partnership with the US also reflects the shared democratic ideals and values of both countries.<sup>72</sup> In this context, the UK's ban of Chinese Huawei 5G technology from its telecommunication networks following US

---

<sup>66</sup> Fareed Zakaria, 'The New China Scare | Foreign Affairs', 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-12-06/new-china-scare>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>67</sup> Crouch Matthew R. and Starling Clementine G. Starling, 'How the US Can Regain the Advantage in Its next National Defense Strategy', *Atlantic Council* (blog), 3 February 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-the-us-can-regain-the-advantage-in-its-next-national-defense-strategy/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>68</sup> see Markus Obermann Shifting the post-Brexit alliances? Britain's China policy between American fervour, European ambiguity, and global British ambition, p. 4. BRIFPO

<sup>69</sup> Lucy Fisher, 'UK Is Too Dependent on China for Critical Goods, Tories Warn', 14 May 2020, sec. news, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-is-too-dependent-on-china-for-critical-goods-tories-warn-bz6vhfvc0>.

<sup>70</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'UK Trading Partners and Trade Relationships - Office for National Statistics', 2 December 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/internationaltrade/articles/uktradingpartnersananalysisoftraderelationships/2020>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>71</sup> House of Commons and Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Global Security: UK-US Relations, Sixth Report of Session 2009–10', 10 March 2010, 23–49.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of State, 'U.S. Relations with United Kingdom', *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed 14 April 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-united-kingdom/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

pressure<sup>73</sup> illustrates that the UK government realised that in the technology and trade driven geopolitical competition between China and the US, it has become increasingly difficult to benefit from economic relations with China without damaging the relationship to the US.<sup>74</sup>

The UK's multilateral initiatives aimed at underpinning the UK leadership were mostly in line with US critical position on China and were taken jointly with or in support of the US. In 2020, the UK sought coordination and common positions on Hong Kong with its more 'traditional' partners, mainly with the 'five eyes' (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States). Generally, the grouping is oriented towards a more critical China position, especially since Australia and New Zealand are also concerned with Chinese trade policies as well as military build-up in Asia.<sup>75</sup> Their common stance was evident in joint statements regarding developments in Hong Kong, such as the postponement of elections in Hong Kong in August 2020<sup>76</sup> and most noticeable when, in response to the enactment of the NSL, they jointly warned that Beijing's action would 'dramatically erode Hong Kong's autonomy' and its position as a 'bastion of freedom'.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, a high level visit by Raab to the US, as well as phone calls between Johnson and Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau as well as Australia's Prime Minister Morrison<sup>78</sup> specifically about Hong Kong suggest that the UK sought active alignment with the 'five eyes' on Hong Kong. Along with the US, the UK also raised the topic of Hong Kong at the UN Security Council.<sup>79</sup> Also, the UK raised Hong Kong in the G7 and issuing national statements at the UN Human Rights Council, in which the

---

<sup>73</sup> Toby Helm, 'Pressure from Trump Led to 5G Ban, Britain Tells Huawei', the Guardian, 18 July 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/18/pressure-from-trump-led-to-5g-ban-britain-tells-huawei>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>74</sup> Charlie Cooper, 'Britain Toughens Stance on China as It Eyes U.S. - POLITICO', *Politico*, 13 July 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/13/boris-johnson-china-huawei-359741>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>75</sup> James Landale, 'UK Huawei Decision Part of Wider Strategic Tensions with China', *BBC News*, 12 July 2020, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53366301>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>76</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 'Hong Kong: Statement on the Erosion of Rights', GOV.UK, 9 August 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kong-statement-on-the-erosion-of-rights>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>77</sup> 'China's Proposed New Security Law for Hong Kong: Joint Statement', GOV.UK, accessed 25 February 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-from-the-uk-australia-canada-and-united-states-on-hong-kong>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>78</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'Foreign Secretary Statement in Washington DC, 16 September 2020', GOV.UK, 16 September 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-statement-in-washington-dc-16-september-2020>. [accessed: 18 April 2021]

<sup>79</sup> Michelle Nichols, 'U.S., Britain Raise Hong Kong at U.N. Security Council, Angering China', *Reuters*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-un-idUSKBN2351ZD>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

UK accused China of not only of threatening the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, but also of violating human rights in Xinjiang.<sup>80</sup>

The BN(O) decision served the UK as a posterchild of the ‘Global Britain’ idea. This allowed the UK to promote itself more credibly as a protector of the people of Hong Kong as well as a supporter of autonomy and democracy in Hong Kong, embodied in the ‘Global Britain’ belief that the UK is a ‘force for good’ to the world. The UK’s BN(O) decision was particularly welcomed in the US since the US had reinforced commitments for autonomy, democracy and the protection of the people of Hong Kong in its Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, which had a large congressional majority.<sup>81</sup> Thus, this aligned the UK on the US policy on Hong Kong, the latter having been especially critical of the undermining of democracy in Hong Kong by China.<sup>82</sup> The increased emphasis on the ‘special relationship’ was not only reflected in the decision to ban 5G from British telecommunication networks, but also by the decision of the Johnson government in 2020 to consider forming a ‘club of democracies’.<sup>83</sup> The so called the D-10 (G7 members plus Australia, India and South Korea) are seen as a platform to address concerns over dependency on Chinese 5G technology and issues of vulnerable supply chains.<sup>84</sup> These policies have been consistent with the goal of the US to contain China, as they would limit Chinese influence on critical technologies of key US allies and try to form a counterweight to China’s technological development. From the UK policy makers’ perspective, the Global Britain idea effectively rules out policy options that would have considered further cooperation on 5G with China, because of its behaviour in Hong Kong. Finally, the UK’s ‘Global Britain’ Hong Kong policies therefore not only converged the UK’s and US position on Hong Kong, but also aligned the UK with Washington’s position on technology in the geopolitical competition with China.

---

<sup>80</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, ‘UN Human Rights Council 45: UK’s Closing Statement’, gov.uk, 16 October 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-45-uks-closing-statement>. [accessed: 18 April 2021]-

<sup>81</sup> Judah and Wright, ‘2021 – A Pivotal Year Ahead for “Global Britain”’, *The Foreign Policy Centre* (blog), 2 December 2020, <https://fpc.org.uk/2021-a-pivotal-year-ahead-for-global-britain/>; BBC News, ‘Hong Kong Protests: Trump Signs Human Rights and Democracy Act into Law - BBC News’, accessed 18 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-50581862>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>82</sup> Demetri Sevastopulo and Primrose Riordan, ‘US Targets Chinese and HK Officials for Undermining City’s Autonomy’, 17 March 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/3c0236a9-871d-4f18-b904-b378ab4f54e9>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>83</sup> Fisher Lucy, ‘Downing Street Plans New 5G Club of Democracies | News | The Times’, 29 May 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/downing-street-plans-new-5g-club-of-democracies-bfnd5wj57>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

<sup>84</sup> Ben Judah and Erik Brattberg, ‘Britain’s D-10 Summit of Democracies Beats a Moribund G-7’, 10 June 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/10/g7-d10-democracy-trump-europe/>. [accessed: 18 April 2021].

## 5 Conclusion

This essay has argued that the idea of ‘Global Britain’ has provided a guide for the UK’s policies towards Hong Kong in 2020. The core beliefs of ‘Global Britain’ have increased clarity about the government’s foreign policy goals and have effectively limited policy options to those which were consistent with the ‘Global Britain’ ideas, namely promoting the UK as a foreign policy actor independent of the EU, strengthening a positive historical image of the UK and advancing its international image as a ‘force for good’. As a consequence, ‘Global Britain’ was promoted internationally through the UK’s Hong Kong policy, but alternative and potentially better policy options for the situation in Hong Kong which could have influenced Chinese behaviour were not conceived, because the UK’s policy followed mainly the guide of the ‘Global Britain’ idea. Moreover, Britain’s Hong Kong policy has aligned the UK closer with the US in its competition with China, which could in fact limit the UK’s desired foreign policy independence of the EU by increasingly having to follow US interests.

The first part of the essay found that the UK’s Hong Policy has become more idealistic and value-based in 2020, most clearly illustrated by the new visa arrangements for British National Overseas (BN(O)) status holders in response to the enactment of the NSL in Hong Kong. The BN(O) decision, the arms embargo and the halting of extraditions were justified by the UK with its historical commitments, the protection of rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, and its leading role in standing up against oppression. The second part found that as a consequence of UK promoting itself internationally as a capable foreign policy actor independent of the EU, the UK and EU took different position on China with regard to Hong Kong. At the same time, the UK aligned itself closer with Washington’s China position due to the UK’s China-critical turn on Hong Kong. This was evident in Britain’s emphasis on the ‘five eyes’ partners, in its cooperation with the EU only indirectly through the E3 format and in the UK seeking alliance with the US on technology balancing China.

Viewed through the prism of ‘Global Britain’ goals, the UK’s Hong Kong policy could be seen as effective, as the BN(O) decision in particular has helped the government to reach its own goals, for instance, drawing international attention to the UK’s foreign policy and gaining self-confidence by focusing on a ‘meaningful’ goal linked to the UK’s history after years of foreign policy Brexit frustration. However, in terms of Britain’s interests in maintaining the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ approach in Hong Kong and agreeing with China on a sustainable and viable future for the city and people of Hong Kong, Britain’s historical justifications have actually made it more difficult to form a common understanding with China. Further, the UK’s

Hong Kong policy will increasingly be seen as part of the competition between the US and China as Hong Kong serves as a symbol of the clash between democracy and the Chinese authoritarian system. Moreover, it's too early to say what the different positions towards China will mean for EU-UK policy coordination, as the CAI agreement could still be vetoed by the European Parliament which would indicate a shift away of the EU's position prioritising economic relations with China. Beyond the UK's Hong Kong policy, this paper has shown that ideas can significantly shape foreign policy under the conditions of uncertainty by changing policymakers' preferences of what are deemed as effective policy options and providing decisive guides for government action.

## Appendix

### *Key Dates*

<b>1839 – 1942</b>	First Opium War, Britain occupied the island of Hong Kong on 25 January 1841
<b>29 August 1824</b>	Treaty of Nanking, China had to cede territory of Hong Kong to the British Empire
<b>1856 –1860</b>	Second Opium War, In the British Convention China had to cede the Kowloon Peninsula to British Hong Kong
<b>9 June 1898</b>	99-year lease agreement on the Hong Kong for the use of Hong Kong after China lost a series of wars
<b>19 December 1984</b>	Margaret Thatcher and Zhao Ziyang signed <i>The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong</i>
<b>1 July 1997</b>	The lease and the British administration over Hong Kong ended. Sovereignty was transferred to the PRC and British Dependent Territory of Hong Kong became Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
<b>1 July 2003,</b>	Hong Kong saw its first mass protests against an attempt to introduce anti-subversion legislation, estimated 500.000 people marched, Article 23 of Hong Kong Basic Law requires a national security legislation
<b>2014</b>	The ‘Umbrella Movement’ demanded reforms of Hong Kong’s electoral system. The initiative ‘Occupy Central’ blocked Hong Kong’s business district for 79 days
<b>2019</b>	People in Hong Kong protested over weeks against a law that would allow extraditions to mainland China, violent clashes between protesters and the police
<b>23 September 2019</b>	Article by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab: Global Britain is leading the world as a force for good
<b>November 2019</b>	Siege of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and violent street battles between student protesters and the police
<b>25 November 2019</b>	Pro-democracy candidates win landslide victory in Hong Kong district elections
<b>18 April 2020</b>	15 pro-democracy activists, including journalists and lawmakers were arrested for taking part in mass protests in Hong Kong
<b>28 May 2020</b>	China’s National People’s Congress approved the proposal to impose new national security legislation for Hong Kong
<b>3 June 2020</b>	Boris Johnson’s article on Hong Kong, which announces changes in visa arrangements of BN(O) passport holders, if China introduces NSL
<b>30 June 2020</b>	China enacts National Security Law (NSL), which criminalises any act of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion.

- 1 July 2020** A day after the imposition of the NSL, the UK’s Foreign Secretary declared in Parliament that the NSL was “a clear and serious breach of the Joint Declaration
- 20 July 2020** UK extended China arms embargo to Hong Kong
- 24 July 2020** European Council’s Conclusions on Hong Kong, common EU response to the NSL
- 11 November 2020** Four pro-democracy lawmakers were dismissed from the Hong Kong’s Legislative Council of Hong Kong, which was considered as another breach of the Joint Declaration
- 12 November 2020** Foreign Secretary declares breach of Sino-British Joint Declaration after events of the 11 November 2020
- 30 December 2020** EU – China agreement in principle on Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
- 31 January 2021** New visa arrangements for BN(O) were officially introduced allowing BN(O)s to apply for British citizenship