



# Future Leaders Programme Essay Collection

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## Lord Hague of Richmond

The Rt Hon Lord Hague of Richmond, William Hague, served for 26 years in the British House of Commons until he stood down in 2015. In that time, he served in many senior roles, including Leader of the House of Commons, but is best known as the Leader of the Conservative party, 1997–2001, and First Secretary of State and Foreign Secretary, 2010–2014. He now pursues a wide range of business and charitable activities, and is a well-known writer of historical biographies and a columnist of *The Times*.

# Foreword



“Would you still go into politics, if you were a young person now?” is one of the questions I am invariably asked when I meet someone for the first time. To which, despite all the many demands of public office particularly in the social media age, the answer is an unequivocal “Yes”.

The coming decades are set to force upon us the most profound political, social, and technological challenges in the history of the world. How do we arrest climate change, control artificial intelligence, manage mass migration, stop pandemics, and prevent global conflict? Each of these questions will be decided by the next generation of political leaders. If you care about the future of our country and genuinely want to help solve these seemingly intractable geopolitical problems, would you really opt for a quiet life?

But getting more dedicated, high-quality people who care about such issues into Parliament is only half the battle. We also need to equip them with the experience and confidence to contribute to debates on thorny geopolitical problems from the moment they take their seats on the green benches.

In the new age of acceleration, MPs will need to respond quickly to fast-moving developments, from the war in Ukraine to technological breakthroughs that raise new defence and security complications, such as artificial intelligence. Gone too are the days of the long parliamentary apprenticeship. Within one parliament, newly elected MPs can find themselves running a select committee, as Tom Tugendhat did, or running an important government department, as Energy Secretary Claire Coutinho is now doing.

Meanwhile, there is a long-term trend towards political parties selecting candidates from the local constituency they seek to represent, and away from candidates with expertise in responding to national and international political problems. This makes the challenge of equipping the next MPs with expertise in foreign affairs all the more urgent.

The Future Leaders programme from the Coalition for Global Prosperity is, therefore, an invaluable initiative, helping parliamentary candidates to broaden their knowledge, connections and experiences on areas of foreign policy. From convening groups of senior political figures to advise candidates to arranging visits to refugee camps in the Middle East, the programme has empowered many soon-to-be MPs with the knowledge to speak with authority on foreign policy.

The rich fruits of this programme are plain to see in this collection of essays from participating candidates. With contributions on complex topics ranging from Britain’s soft power, to education, to the role of technology in development, and the importance of critical minerals, it is clear that the new intake of MPs will not be lacking in experience or enthusiasm for international affairs. I look forward to seeing many of the participating candidates debating these thoughtful arguments and ideas on the floor of the House of Commons in the next parliament.





# The critical minerals opportunity

Deng Xiaoping famously, and probably apocryphally, said “the Middle East has oil; China has rare earths.” It heralded a change in how China looked at mineral resources and focused foreign policy around an era of global industrialisation and economic growth.

As China makes aggressive noises over Taiwan and there are signs that President Xi Jinping’s problematic economic policy is faltering, it is vital that the UK rises to the challenge of developing its own resources-led trade strategy that is not dependent on China.

How will the UK secure independent and reliable supply chains for the green energy transition, supporting the growth of its automotive and aerospace manufacturers while meeting its defence commitments?

Rare Earths are among the most abundant minerals on earth, but the difficulty is in processing those metals that are needed as magnet materials. Processing is complicated because mined rare earth oxides frequently contain radioactive metals. This makes it not only challenging environmentally, but also technologically and financially to compete with China’s industry on a level playing field.

China is home to around 85% of the world’s rare earths oxide processing capacity, but it only operates that needed to meet domestic demand from magnet makers and downstream OEMs (original equipment manufacturers). It does not allow overseas investment in any part of its rare earths industry and fiscal policy makes it difficult to export mined production. Increasingly, it is building up its offshore resources base too.

## Rachel Carnac

Conservative parliamentary candidate and leader of the Conservative Group on Canterbury City Council. She has a professional background in international resources and commodities.



Plus, earlier in 2023 it made it clear it intends to prohibit and restrict rare earth and rare earth permanent magnet related exports of technology used in wind turbines, mobile phones, and electric vehicles.

There is a similar picture for other metals that are key ingredients in the components used to make solar panels, MRI imaging devices, F-35 fighter jets, as well as required for gigafactories and many other cutting-edge products. These will be vital for economic growth as we transition to renewable forms of energy, AI, and greater digitisation, and we can’t afford to take them for granted.

A year ago, the UK launched its Critical Minerals Strategy, which sets out to “boost domestic capability in a way that generates new jobs and wealth, attracting investment and playing a leading role in solving global challenges with our international partners”. This is set to accelerate growth of the UK’s domestic capabilities and resulted in the Critical Raw Material Act being passed earlier this year.

The UK government is picking up the pace, but it still needs to work harder to catch up to the USA, Australia, Japan, Canada, and the EU which are making substantial financial commitments globally.

One solution would be for the government to back financially a mining and metals investment fund, which would co-invest in securing the critical metals required by UK manufacturers, provide export guarantees, inject more money into developing processing and recycling technology, and encourage investment from the fossil-based sectors back into mining. The UK could strengthen bilateral links with major mining nations, particularly by moving processing to the southern hemisphere. It is also important not to isolate China as a result of this, but to find common and shared purpose. Some small investment schemes have been established by the UK government, but they are still only pennies compared to the amounts our western allies are spending.

Only recently Paul Atherley, Chairman of UK rare earths mining company Pensana, said the UK is not doing as well as other countries in providing the capital incentives needed to invest. He pointed to the scheme in place in the USA through the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides tax incentives to develop critical minerals, as well as support for companies looking to develop mine processing capacity by Australia and the EU.

Japan may provide an example that the UK could emulate. After the 2010 rare earth supply shock, it moved speedily to use diplomacy in Asia to target state-led investment in the rare earths sector. Japan has directed substantial government funds to support mining projects and has secured the rights to metals through off-take agreements needed to support its domestic automotive sector.

This is a golden opportunity for the UK to take a global leadership role and back development, particularly in Africa, which will provide the rare earths and other metals vital to secure the UK’s future industrial growth while rebuilding strategic partnerships in the region through trade and development programmes. The recent UK-Zambia Clean Energy Partnership is a start.

As the race to develop new supply chains less reliant on China accelerates, African nations are hosting a ministerial meeting this autumn on critical metals. This will set out to establish an African Organisation of Critical Metals to reshape the production landscape across the continent and foster deeper regional cooperation. There has never been a more pertinent time for the UK to take a pivotal role in the international minerals resources sector.

# Political polarisation in the social media age

For weeks, the Prime Minister had been working hard to convince the Labour Leader that his views on Syria were being taken seriously. Evidence was supplied, briefings took place, a Commons motion was even amended. The hope was that when it came to it the Opposition would back the Government on this crucial aspect of foreign policy.

Yet despite suggestions to the contrary, in August 2013 Ed Miliband chose to sabotage David Cameron's vote for possible UK military action to deter Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons. The Coalition Government lost by 285 votes to 272.

The Opposition are rarely given the opportunity to defeat a Government – by rushing to seize their chance, they opted for the short-term sugar rush of isolationism. Not only were there dire geopolitical consequences but, perhaps more pervasively, trust was eviscerated.

Whether between the two party leaders or among US, UK and European allies – expected international roles built over centuries were weakened.

The world has changed considerably in the last decade.

10 years ago just 1.72 billion or 24 per cent of the globe was active on social media. There are now 4.88 billion regular users – almost 61 per cent of our total population. With it came a total destabilisation of the anticipated mores of the political arena.

Gaining popularity when trust in establishment organisations was already in decline, and now it has added fuel to an already accelerating trend. We generally follow those we agree with. We are exposed to less and less diversity of thought, our values and principles reinforced by like-minded accounts, narrowing our world view.

Social media has contributed to a chilling effect on our view of institutions. The latest MHP Polarisation Tracker revealed that three quarters of voters believe 'people in power often work together to frustrate the will of the people,' while two thirds believe 'mainstream media aren't really independent, they work together to push the elite's political agenda.'

As with any enfranchising technology, there are those who seek to use it for good and those for ill – the same tool that made possible the 2011 Arab Spring, also amplified populist rhetoric and further stoked the division that led to the 2021 US Capitol attack.

Whether domestic or international, the influence of digital platforms incentivises political polarisation. It often rewards brash confidence and simplistic narratives, algorithmically punishing nuance, moderation and complexity. It magnifies the intensity of political feeling, which should require today's legislators to be more sophisticated and adept at handling this new electoral dynamic.

Whilst some responsible policymakers get to grips with their duty to use digital channels with care, the role of social media in shaping public opinion has of course been seized upon by hostile state actors. A wealth of accessible, individualised data and behavioural insights make it all too tempting to wield creative content to suit nefarious ends.

## Mario Creatura

Conservative parliamentary candidate. He is currently a Director at a communications agency, and was previously a Special Adviser in 10 Downing Street, serving Prime Minister Theresa May from 2017 until 2019.



A foundational tactic in disinformation manipulation has been the use of the simple meme. Extremism expert Todd C. Helmus notes that 'Russia used memes to target the 2016 US election; China used memes to target protesters in Hong Kong; and those seeking to question the efficacy of vaccines for coronavirus disease 2019 used memes as a favourite tool.'

Then, along comes Artificial Intelligence – once locked in the realm of science fiction, it has in recent years begun taking its tentative first steps into mainstream use and with it a whole host of challenges.

As night follows day, alongside the creative opportunities of AI comes 'deepfake': digitally altered footage in which a face has been artificially modified to appear as someone else, often saying or doing something that the 'owner' of the stolen identity never intended.

In July 2022 social media users claimed a video of President Joe Biden posted by the Democratic Party was a deepfake. It took the White House to officially engage to debunk the conspiracy theory – but this relatively minor event highlights a much larger, blood-chilling concern.

Knowing about deepfake, could reality be ignored if it is incompatible with held views? What if it was fake, but said something offensive? What if it was believed? Could a well-made deepfake spread fear and panic among the populace, or other world leaders? Is it conceivable that this forces a response or is used as a pretence for retaliation?

This is not a baseless fear, among others the European Parliament is taking it very seriously: 'An assessment of the risks associated with deepfakes shows that they can be psychological, financial and societal in nature, and their impacts can range from the individual to the societal level.'

The subverting influence of social media, the unpredictable rise of AI and deepfakes, the weakening of respect in our institutions – responding to these era-defining challenges may seem daunting, yet I believe it provides the current and next generation of political leaders with a singular overarching mission: the restoration of trust.

Those of us wanting to serve must acknowledge our role in stabilising our world order. Doing that means protecting the values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. It means standing with our national and international allies to defend these core principles, robustly opposing anyone or anything that endangers them.

History teaches us that when our liberal democracies are threatened we rise to the challenge. The arena may now include the digital realm, but the fundamental call to arms is the same: we must work to hold together an increasingly sceptical world with strong values, deep relationships and the unbridled trust that we will build a more peaceful, more prosperous planet.





# The UK has a duty to use its soft power as a force for good

It isn't anything new to suggest that the UK's soft power is one of our greatest strengths. Soft power is an effective way to demonstrate global leadership and frame issues around the prism of your own values. It is also a key pillar of diplomacy; a way for global leaders, like the UK, to shape geopolitical outcomes and work with others to solve the world's trickiest problems.

I recently went on a visit to Jordan with the Coalition of Global Prosperity. It was a privilege to meet and speak with leading experts in their fields, all working to deliver a thriving Jordan and a more secure Middle East. Whilst the concept of soft power has long been on my radar, I realised that it isn't something you can completely understand until you experience it. Visiting Jordan gave me that understanding in spades.

The UK has many soft power assets that it can be proud of; its world-leading education institutions, its approach to science and technological innovation, its sport, its culture, and its values. Our advantage leaves us ideally placed to build alliances across the world and gives us a route to participating in the most important conversations about global security, international development and diplomacy.

We saw during our visit how fundamental our soft power is, not just in terms of policy-making, but to the ambitions and outlooks of Jordan's citizens. Jordan is a country with significant challenges. Currently, one third of those living in the country are refugees (largely from Syria, although also from Palestine, Iraq and other neighbouring countries). We heard loud and clear that, whilst Jordan is pleased to help those in need, it naturally comes at a substantial financial cost. Its generous hosting is now leading to overburdened public services, creaking infrastructure, and even-growing pressure on its natural resources.

## Kate Fairhurst

Conservative parliamentary candidate. Kate Fairhurst is a local councillor in Reigate and a Director at a strategy consultancy.

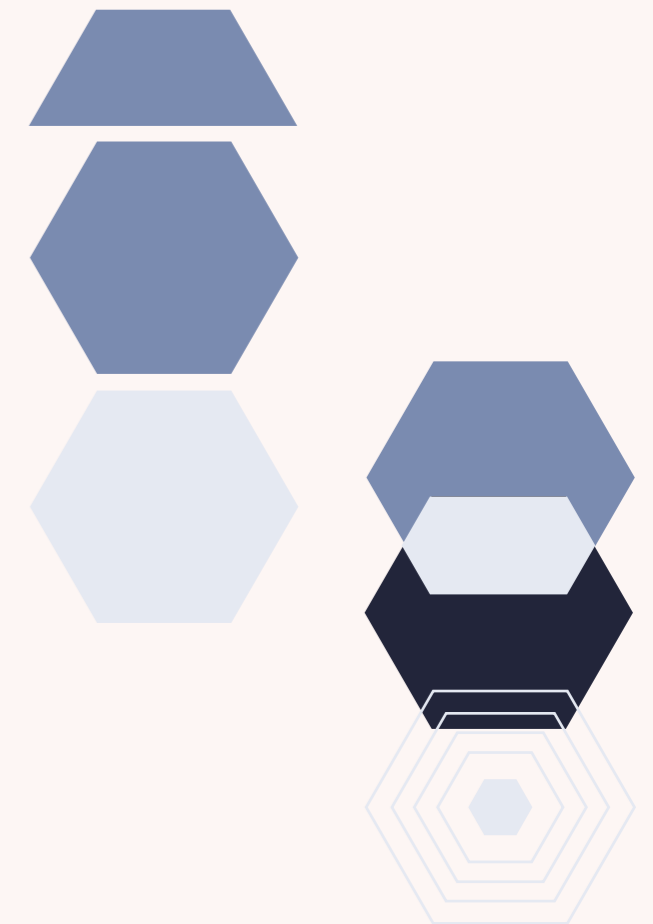


Despite its challenges, Jordanians have a positive vision for their future, and their desire to work with the UK is heartening. Indeed, we are intrinsically woven into the fabric of their society through their Royal family. His Majesty King Abdullah has a British Mother, and the Prince and Princess of Wales attended the Crown Prince's wedding in Jordan earlier this year. It is a link that they are very proud of.

It was difficult to speak to anyone in Jordan, whether that be MPs and Ministers, aid workers, teachers, diplomats or otherwise, who wasn't keen to talk about the exciting opportunities that lie within British soft power. Many of those we met had attended the UK's universities and were excited to bring back their learnings and relationships to their home country. The British Council is doing extensive work in teaching English to local people, with it being described to us as 'the gateway' to a more successful future.

It was humbling to speak to those who valued the British contribution to the global stage so highly. In the cut and thrust of domestic politics, particularly at a time of such significant economic challenge, it is easy to forget the bigger picture. Several years ago, I recall attending an event with Jeremy Hunt, then Foreign Secretary and current Chancellor of the Exchequer. He remarked that, in his experience, countries all over the world have a far more positive view of the UK than we often do of ourselves. I didn't fully appreciate what he meant at the time, but my experience in Jordan has made me reflect on it a lot.

The UK doesn't just have an opportunity to use its soft power, but it has a duty to use it. We are experiencing so many severe global challenges, many of which we do not yet have feasible solutions for. Now more than ever is a need for the UK to demonstrate leadership to deliver diplomatic outcomes, contribute more meaningfully to development to those most in need (including a return to 0.7%), and protect and promote the democratic frameworks we hold so dear.



# Wellbeing: the key to Global Britain's contribution to international development

We all know that there is more to life than wealth. Albert Einstein said “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

Yet public debate about UK aid continues to obsess over narrow economic measurements. When discussing UK aid contributions worldwide, we tend to focus on the impact we've had on poverty and economic development – certainly important, but also presenting a very narrow perspective in the public debate.

What makes this even more unusual is that we're increasingly moving away from this way of thinking at home. In the UK we recognise the importance of improving our national wellbeing. We live in a society where knowing that there's more to life than money isn't just recognised as a healthy way to live – it's also seen as a legitimate policy goal for government; indeed, the government has ministers for both loneliness and suicide prevention.

This view is spreading internationally. The UN, the OECD and many national governments all measure wellbeing in some way; the UN's World Happiness Report, published annually for over a decade, has helped to spread this way of thinking.

All of this presents an opportunity for Global Britain to show real international leadership. Britain should work to embed wellbeing indicators into international development and take the lead on applying the lessons we learn here at home to the poorest countries in the world.

## James Hamblin

Conservative parliamentary candidate. He is a former naval officer, crisis management security analyst and Chief of Staff to a Member of Parliament.



Yet while we certainly don't suffer from a lack of data when it comes to measuring wellbeing, we have yet to truly work out exactly how to apply this data to improve people's lives in the real world. Measurements are one thing, practical application is another.

There are substantial benefits to incorporating wellbeing into policy application. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing argues that a 'wellbeing lens' can help to pinpoint spending priorities and evaluate the effectiveness of policy interventions.

So why has this taken so long and been so difficult to implement? Even here in the UK, a world leader in this area, we have more to do on this front. The answer can be found in a 2020 House of Lords report. Citing the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, it explains that it all comes down to what you're aiming for; objectives matter.

Policies involve trade-offs. Reducing commuting times by spending money on better road infrastructure could also lead to worse air quality, which has consequences over the longer term. Ranking these choices depends on a clear understanding of your objectives.

In his recent book “Wellbeing: Science and Policy”, the Labour peer Lord Richard Layard argues that governments and NGOs should aim to maximise wellbeing over a person's lifetime.

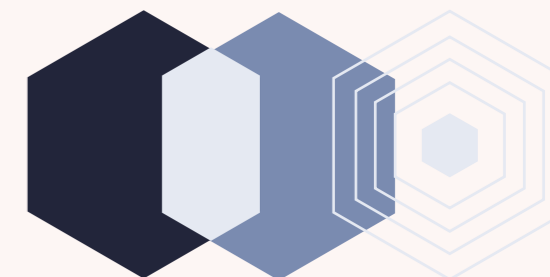
This should be the explicit aim of UK development aid. We should assist countries to incorporate the practical application of wellbeing indicators in their own government policies, while we simultaneously do so at home. UK development aid should be measured on its impact on wellbeing in the countries we spend it in.

In developing countries, particularly those that experience multiple changes of government over a person's lifetime, incorporating this kind of long term thinking would make a substantial difference.

In 2016 the Boston Consulting Group measured 163 countries on nearly 50,000 data points relating to economics, investment and sustainability. Their report, the Sustainable Economic Development Assessment (SEDA), showed that countries with high levels of wellbeing scored well on a range of other development indicators; unsurprisingly the top rankings went to the usual suspects like Norway, while countries in sub-saharan Africa cluster at the bottom.

Public interest in this across the rich world is accelerating, and Western countries are pioneering in this area; New Zealand already has an annual Wellbeing Budget. Now we need to apply this to how we think about getting the most bang for our buck in some of the world's poorest countries, particularly at a time that aid budgets are being pared back.

Across the West, we've rightly recognised that understanding and enhancing wellbeing is critical for social progress. Now the UK must lead the way in applying the same thinking to our understanding of aid and development, demonstrating another way in which Global Britain acts as a force for good in the world.





# Britain's soft power brings influence in the Middle East

Despite the naysayers, Global Britain lives on. At this critical inflection point for geopolitics and the international order, the Britain of the 21st Century still has a major role in shaping and responding to world events – greater than GDP share or population size might suggest. In playing its part on the world stage, Britain has a tool that is too often underestimated – our so-called ‘soft’ power. The government’s Integrated Review of foreign, development and defence policy recognised this, and reconfirmed Britain’s commitment to the global community. If we really believe in Britain as a force for good in the world then how we use our soft power in pursuing freedom and democratic values is crucial.

It matters to the UK population at large, too. A recent survey by the British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) found that only 5% said they were ‘uninterested’ in the UK’s foreign policy. Turbulent geopolitics has heightened concerns amongst the public about Russia, China and how security abroad affects our security at home. How we respond to these threats matter.

In a time of international polycrises, it has perhaps never been more important that we use our strengths and global influences to shape the world, for the benefit of all. This is not about being a ‘global policeman’ but nor is it right that we concern ourselves only with what happens on our own shores. What happens elsewhere has a direct impact on our own prosperity and security.

I saw at first hand, in a visit to Jordan in July 2023, how our soft power and influence are being used in practice. Just 20km from the border with Syria, the Za’atari refugee camp houses 85,000 of more than 1 million people who have crossed the border since the 2012 crisis. Za’atari is a juxtaposition of transition and permanence, since whilst those there desperately pray for a time when they can return home they are rebuilding the lives they once had, and looking to the future.

More than half of those living in Za’atari are children, and they have the same dreams and aspirations as the young people for whom I work in the UK education system on a daily basis. The British Council is one of the UK’s greatest exports, but perhaps not one of its best known.

## Stewart Harper

Conservative parliamentary candidate and Regional Chairman for the Conservative Party in Yorkshire & The Humber. He is a Chartered Company Secretary, who works in the education, health and housing sectors.



They have been working, through their Connecting Classrooms programme, to support the young people in the camp in facilitating learning, and giving them a wider view of the world into which they will grow up. But there is more to do, especially with school enrolment rates among refugees falling when they reach secondary school age.

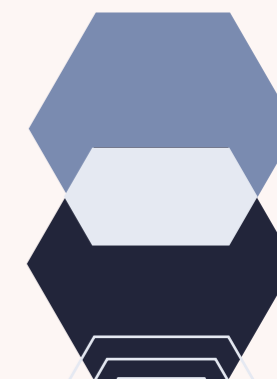
But the British Council plays another role in Jordan. Their work in English language teaching, teaching 5,000 students each year – across a range of different age groups each with their own motivations to learn the language – has expanded the horizons of generations into pursuing their aspirations globally. I saw at first hand their work with young officers in the Jordanian army, who are learning English before they come to Britain to train at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Like their Commander in Chief King Abdullah, who trained there in the 1980s, successive generations of Jordanian army officers have trained at Sandhurst, and so the ‘soft’ reach of the British Army reaches far beyond deployment of boots on the ground.

Jordan itself faces significant challenges, not least in the availability of water and other natural resources to meet the demands of its growing population of 11 million, which includes an estimated 1.3 million Syrian refugees. Geopolitically, Jordan must hold the conflicting factions of the Middle East – and in doing so has a major role in ensuring that peace in that region holds and develops. In that respect the support of the UK government, in training the Jordanian military for example, has a direct impact in ensuring a more peaceful world.

And that makes us safer at home, too. There is a direct and obvious correlation between the stability of the world and the safety of UK citizens. In the survey by the BFPG, three quarters recognised that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was a direct threat to UK security, and even more recognised the economic consequences we would face as a result. The same would be true if the fragile truce in the Middle East was to be lost. So, our influence through soft power is making us safer.

Returning my thoughts to Za’atari, the point that hit home most was a child – about the same age as my son, who – with the help of the British Council and as a result of UK development funding – wanted to learn English ‘to give him more chances in the world’. A Global Britain must surely support such a desire.

Perhaps soft power is not so soft, after all.





# Syria and living with the legacy of the Iraq conflict

In 2013, Bashar al-Assad ordered chemical attacks on Syrian rebels in Ghouta, Damascus, killing hundreds of men, women and children, in one of most horrifying acts perpetrated against civilians in the 21st century.

The initially non-violent, pro-democratic uprising in Syria began in 2011 and was precipitated by the worst drought in Syrian history. Assad came down hard on his opponents, having seen a number of his fellow leaders deposed during the Arab Spring. By 2012, Syria had descended into full blown civil war.

The images of the aftermath of the sarin gas attacks were disturbing and condemnations resounded from all corners of the globe. Naturally, we in the UK felt outrage, none more so than the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, who brought a motion to parliament, proposing UK intervention. Following an impassioned debate however, he was defeated, striking a huge personal and political blow to Cameron.

The UK is no stranger to challenging dictators, the degree of success in doing so however, is debatable and largely depends upon how you measure success. The 2003 invasion of Iraq for instance, initially enjoyed the broad support of the British public, but following the chaos in Iraq after our withdrawal, the revelation that the United Nations found no evidence of any stockpiles of Weapons of Mass Destruction, combined with the loss of 179 British soldiers, countless allied and Iraqi lives, as well as the damning findings of the Chilcot Inquiry, the legacy of the Iraq invasion is looked back upon as a dark chapter in our political history. Two decades later, it is still a contentious issue and has undoubtedly influenced foreign policy and made us far more cautious when it comes to considering British military intervention and in my view, largely accounts for parliament voting against deploying UK forces to Syria.

The Middle East has an intricate power system and I think as citizens of an island nation, we sometimes fail to comprehend the complex and symbiotic nature of middle eastern nations. The mixture of issues are not terribly easy to understand, let alone attempt to resolve. Myriad countries have been drawn into the Syria conflict, from Israel; which has launched attacks on Assad's forces, Turkey; which has supported and provided weapons to Syrian rebels, Russia; which with a little help from Iran, is pushing for Syria and Turkey to restore relations, all while the Arab League is trying to rehabilitate Assad back into the fold. A game of Ker-plunk springs to mind; as every action in the Middle East has a wide-spread knock on for the region, which is precisely why force alone will never work and why the UK, with our unique history and experience, has so much to offer in terms of diplomacy.

During a recent trip to Jordan, I saw first-hand just how powerful British diplomacy can be, as well as the plethora of other forms of soft-power we have at our disposal. From health schemes, to language programmes, even the ties between our royal families, all contribute to stability and cooperation.

Despite Jordan's own woes, they have borne the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis, but they have done so, at least in part, with the help of British foreign aid.

## Hannah Jarvis

Conservative parliamentary candidate and army veteran. She has volunteered her time to humanitarian work, including assisting Afghan former British interpreters in coming to the UK following the 2022 fall of Kabul, and delivering medical aid to Ukraine.



In the current economic climate, it's all too easy to look at slashing our foreign aid budget and is perhaps an easy win when it comes to the majority of the electorate. It's not difficult to understand why the average British man or woman can't connect with a far-flung country and appreciate the full advantage to regional stability in another continent and I think that when we rolled the Department for International Development into Foreign Office, we lost a critical means to domestically make the case for foreign spending.

Not maintaining 0.7 per cent of GDP for foreign aid was another mistake in my view, especially in light of Brexit and the ensuing war in Ukraine. Yes, economically and politically, the only thing we can predict is unpredictability, but surely the benefit of a proportional amount that rises and falls in line with economic performance, means we can maintain our overseas objectives and obligations.

We can't approach Syria, or indeed the Middle East in the way we would with a western aggressor. In the west, diplomacy generally means engaging with a government, in the Middle East, there are a range of authorities to contend with. From politicians, to faith leaders and different branches of that faith, tribal leaders, rebel leaders and allies who share a physical border. All need careful consideration.

Although there's clearly no quick or easy fix in Syria, it was hard for me as a mother to set aside my emotions after seeing the images of child victims of the 2013 gas attacks. At the time, I wanted decisive action to ensure Assad could never again do such a thing. I felt attacks on civilians crossed a line and diplomacy alone wasn't going to cut it. It therefore upsets me to think that the Iraq war, a war that I fought in, perhaps caused parliament to lose its nerve when it came to another middle-eastern conflict.

Of course the process of committing to military action is a decision that should not be taken lightly. It requires the utmost of consideration; cautious planning, no small amount of funding, support from allies, as well as those

in the region, a willingness to commit to long-term involvement, plus consensus from the United Nations and other international forums. Whilst we must not be afraid to deploy force in face of brutality and defend the vulnerable, it must be a last resort and we must remember the mistakes of the past; that an exit strategy is as important as an invasion and we must be willing to contribute to long-term peace, lest another Kabul 2021.

We must be as generous as we can with foreign aid: overseas stability directly promotes domestic stability. Through initiatives such as education and health programmes, we are able to share our values and bring matters such as gender equality and LGBT+ rights to the fore. If citizens are prosperous, it prevents them turning to terrorist organisations or the illegal drugs trade in desperation and it stems the flow of immigrants seeking safety in other countries. Steady economies promote mutually beneficial trade agreements and strong relations afford us the ability to negotiate them.

I would hate for us to lose our identity as a nation of moral strength because of historical mistakes. We should never be afraid to challenge aggressors and defend the vulnerable, but this should never be at the cost of diplomacy. No matter how hard it is to stomach trying to work with tyrants, we must use all the weapons in our arsenal; diplomacy, allied influence, food programmes and education, all of which can run alongside military action. Condemnations are not enough and sticking plaster solutions such as sanctions, rarely produce the desired effect, because they usually impact the poorest in society. We must be consistent in our influence, generous with our foreign aid and take the lead in promoting a fair and democratic society.

We voted against military action in Syria in 2013, I accept that, but there is still plenty the UK can and should be doing.

# Development and AI: the future of British leadership

Imagine a world where technology could use mobile phone data to identify people in financial need and transfer money directly to them. Imagine a world where we could use facial recognition to help refugees find their family and friends, whilst also providing an education to children living in refugee camps. Imagine a world where we could forecast impending natural disasters and warn people with enough time to evacuate.

Thanks to Artificial Intelligence, we don't have to imagine – we already live in a world where we can do all this, and more.

Technological progress has always offered a way to lift people out of poverty and to alleviate global challenges. The industrial revolution lifted millions of people out of poverty, and improved living conditions at a pace not seen before in history. New AI technologies could turbocharge global efforts in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and to ending absolute poverty. They could provide vital assistance during crises and they could help fight climate change. Projections suggest that advances in AI could double economic growth rates by 2035. If we plan effectively, technology could lift many millions of people out of poverty in a short time again.

The Government has made clear its intention to be a world leader in AI. It is busy preparing for the Global AI Safety Summit in a few weeks – the first of its kind. At UNGA, the Foreign Secretary announced the UK's 'AI for Development' programme – and set out the UK's vision for using AI to benefit the world's poorest.

Today, 700 million people are living in extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 a day). Almost 80 million people are displaced due to conflict and persecution. Over 140 million people could be displaced by climate change in the next 25 years. Conflict, persecution, and climate change disproportionately affect resource-constrained regions. These threats are putting pressure on the most vulnerable in the world – the people who are least able to mitigate their significant and traumatising impacts.

## Resham Kotecha

Conservative Party candidate, a Social Mobility Commissioner and Head of Engagement for Women2Win. She works in data policy and sits on the Government's Smart Data Council.



The use of AI in development is nascent, but developing quickly. Its use is enabled by rapidly increasing datasets, impressive improvements in computing power, increasing global digital connectivity and accelerating improvements in algorithmic design. The application of AI, including Machine Learning (ML), offers impressive potential across agriculture, healthcare, humanitarian crises, education, and climate. AI is able to build on data-driven ML to forecast disasters such as flooding, drought, and famine. It can use historic data to predict movements of displaced migrants and can track terrorist groups through social media. It can process images, text, and social media posts at an incredible rate, and then alert emergency services to human rights abuses and people trafficking.

However, the risks associated with AI are as great as its potential. Algorithms can perpetuate racial stereotypes, discriminate against minority groups, and embed systemic issues. They can lead to unfair outcomes for minority groups, impact access to resources, and invade people's privacy. These issues are of particular importance in areas of political instability, where there is a history of ethnic conflict, and where populations are already in conflict. Algorithmic opacity makes it challenging to recognise when they are amplifying inequalities. It can be close to impossible to establish accountability, assign responsibility, or to seek redress for negative consequences.

These powerful technologies are shaped by the data that feeds them. This means that their applications are only as good as the data that they rely on. A lack of relevant or timely data can hinder the development of suitable algorithms. When evolving human behaviour and environmental factors are not accounted for, algorithms can provide deeply flawed predictions. Biased data or bad data will inevitably lead to biased or bad algorithms.

Algorithmic predictions based on people with different cultures, behaviours, and life circumstances are likely to be less successful, and in critical situations, might put people in harm. These negative consequences can be exacerbated by the biases within those datasets, and the biases of those creating and utilising them.

Rigorous data and algorithmic evaluation can be labour and cost-intensive. They need those leveraging the technologies to have the knowledge, skills, and resources to assess the outcomes, and for Governments to establish a data ecosystem and framework that support effective application and evaluation.

As we look to the AI Safety Summit, and beyond, our approach to AI should leverage the incredible potential it has to achieve the UNSDGs and to improve the lives of millions. Our ambition should be to develop a global strategic roadmap to catalyse the progress of AI for development. We should use a participatory approach, making sure technologies are designed and assessed by a diverse group of people. We should encourage an open data approach where it is safe to do so, so that algorithms, and outcomes, can be tested. We should aim to be world leaders in data literacy, data analysis and data cleansing that are needed to truly benefit from algorithmic power. Our ambition should be to develop a global strategic roadmap to catalyse the progress of AI for development.

Most importantly, our approach to AI in Development should include a renewed commitment and passion to ending poverty – at home, and around the world.



# The local case for the international cause

All politics is local. A phrase attributed to US Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas O'Neill, and one that any politician forgets at their peril.

As any psychologist will tell you, we think short-term and make decisions on the basis of what we know. In politics, decisions get made by those who have successfully persuaded someone to vote for them. Often, that means ultra-local beats long-term. A wise MP – or rather, an MP who wants to be re-elected – plays local. Even with long-term departmental funding agendas, at best a Government has to plan to deliver within a five-year electoral cycle. Yet we're on our third Government in three years.

And that doesn't serve Britain.

This is not an argument for a technocracy, but as democrats we have to be aware of our weaknesses, and a significant weakness is that it is very easy to fight elections on local wins and quick results that don't pay back over the long term. Economic development operates on a greater scale than one-town constituencies or three-town councils and takes longer than five years. Current growth projections for Britain are poor; and Poland is on track to be wealthier than Britain by just 2030. Like a frog in slowly boiling water, it doesn't seem that we've realised this. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, stagnating in low productivity, and under threat of increasing expansion from China, only a few things stand between us and a slow and steady decline.

I live in a town called Leamington. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Leamington was in decline: a formerly prosperous spa town but one sliding into decay, paint peeling and cracks appearing in the walls of the Regency houses. Then manufacturing grew and later in the twentieth century two things happened: Warwick university opened, and the growth of the gaming sector boomed.



## Frances Lasok

Conservative parliamentary candidate and an experienced campaign manager and strategist.

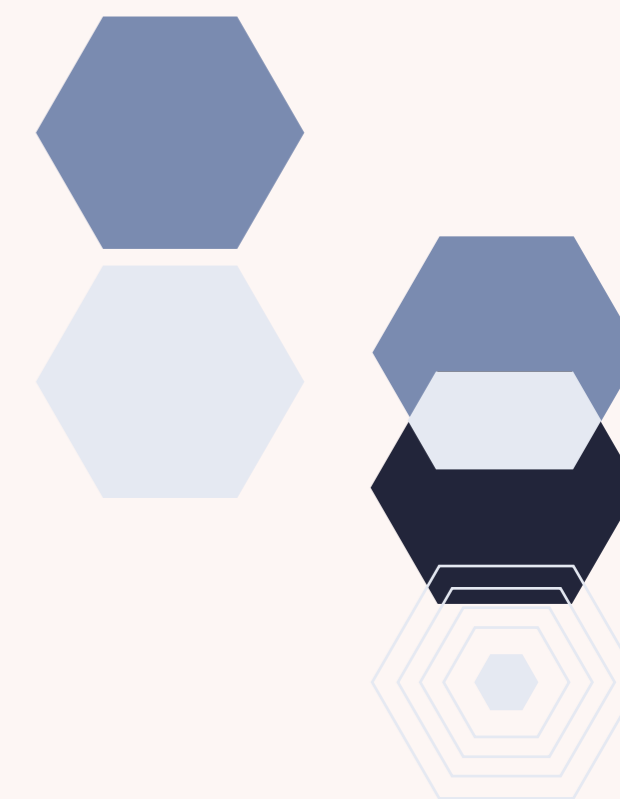


Now, if you go for a drink in the cocktail bars on a Friday, often the people you'll meet are international – students, or people in their twenties and early thirties here to work in tech or manufacturing. And that transformed the town, magnitudes of times more so than injections of levelling up funding would have done.

But that relies on Britain having a place on the international stage. Our status as a world-leader in areas like services and tech relies on our status as an innovation cluster that draws the best and the brightest worldwide, and that relies on international policy: the soft power of English, the status that comes from international markets for British goods. And looking ahead, that means building the relationships through development with the countries that are going to be superpowers and have the purchasing power in fifty years' time. Think about the impact of population growth in Africa, which is expected to double by 2050, while its working age population is expected to grow by 450 million people by 2035. Because if we don't, China will.

We represent investment in aid as an either/or – the idea that *either* we spend money abroad *or* spend money in the UK. But that's a false equivocation, assuming every pound spent has an equal return on investment. That's true of local development – £500 worth of hanging baskets on the Parade in Leamington is worth less to the town than a timely visa process for a Sri Lankan developer coming to work here – and it's also true of alleviating poverty.

Where the UK Government makes change through international development, it is more often the case that coldly and simply lives are saved or transformed by economic development: a bathroom built at a school that allows girls to attend secondary education. Any psychologist will also tell you that while we think short-term and make decisions on the basis of what we know, often that's the wrong thing long-term. A town like Leamington was saved not by pouring money into the high street, but by companies coming to the town and bringing international talent there. The best track to alleviating rural poverty can sometimes be a thriving overseas export market for British beef. To best serve local agendas, to maintain our status as GREAT Britain, we can't afford to sit out internationally. Politicians forget this at our peril.





# Climate change, conflict and consumption

Mainstream media has finally begun to highlight the accelerating worldwide environmental crises to the masses with raging fires, flash floods, earthquakes, and typhoons now a daily feature of the 6 o'clock news. The events are nothing new, but their frequency and increased prominence is.

According to the UN, the world is on track to reach a 2.8C temperature rise by the end of the century, far exceeding the aims of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 to 2C. It is therefore incomprehensible that world leaders are failing to recognise and prioritise a call to arms to combat the single most compelling conflict facing this and future generations with any meaningful alacrity. The greatest and most devastating battle of our days will not be an expansion of empire, a stampede of fortune seekers speculating for gold (metallic or liquid), or even a desire to embed religious ideology. It will be a life and death struggle to control safe and habitable land that can sustain our existence and provide for our expanding population. The next war will be over wheat and water.

Living in New Delhi in 2009 was my environmental and world security wake-up call. India's annual prosperity is determined by the monsoon season and its arrival is timed to the day and hour. From June to September India receives 75% of its annual rainfall, which sustains its \$3 trillion agriculture-dependent economy. So, imagine the devastation wreaked by a year when it simply never arrived followed by the next year of torrential rain that never stopped. In 2009 and 2010 this was the reality that led to devastating crop failure, starvation and, more significantly, mass movement of rural communities to the larger cities, already overwhelmed by population growth, a deficit in housing supply, insufficient health and community provision and a crumbling Victorian infrastructure.

Sound familiar? It should, because this is increasingly the situation we see emerging here in the UK and across Europe. We, as one of the most organised and affluent nations, appear to be unable to plan and implement medium to long term strategies that will deliver growth, and house, feed, nurture, protect or simply placate our increasingly worried and vocal populace whilst finding a balance with halting and actively reversing the damage inflicted by man to the natural environment that is fundamental to our continued existence.

Don't get me wrong, I am no hessian wearing, mud hut living, Net Zero zealot that decries all development, demands a halt to progress and innovation and a return to cave dwelling. I am however a proud flag flyer for nature restoration, sustainable solutions, and resource security! That is why I am passionate about the work of the Conservative Environment Network, an independent forum that encourages informed debate, builds consensus, and champions market-based solutions.

Automation, digitalisation and expansion will be the driving forces that deliver new business opportunities, ensure they are faster and cheaper, and guarantee a competitive edge. But at what price? The industrial land planning and development global market report predicts that the current market of \$12.23 billion will grow to \$17.64 billion by 2027. That growth will accelerate our vast consumption of natural landscapes and feed our insatiable appetite for raw materials and minerals.

## Jane MacBean

Conservative Party candidate and a unitary Councillor in Buckinghamshire, where she currently chairs its Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee. She sits on the Boards of the Conservative Environment Network and the Chilterns AONB.

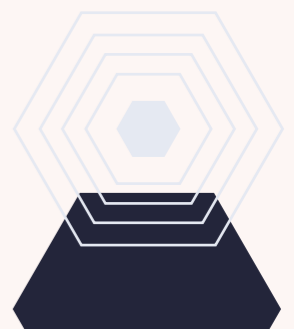
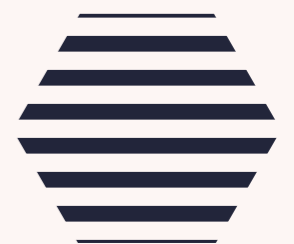


Material consumption has hit a record 100 billion tonnes a year with half that total made up of sand, clay, gravel, and cement used for building – making concrete the most consumed material in the world after water. It is from some of our most politically unstable regions that we source 'conflict minerals', such as tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold, the staples of modern life used in the mobile phones, cars, and jewellery that we consume relentlessly. Conflict minerals that sustain violent armed groups, overthrow legitimate governments, underpin forced labour, embolden human rights abuses, and fund an insatiable international arms industry.

Mass consumption and modern production processes will result in further soil degradation, excessive water consumption, biodiversity loss, damage to ecosystems and climate change exacerbation. All of which will contribute to rising global temperatures that will, ultimately, see hundreds of millions of people displaced. By 2050, climate migration will significantly increase, with predictions ranging from 25 million to 1.2 billion people moving due to climate-related impacts. Irrespective of whether they are escaping the long-term effects of climate change related disasters, seeking relief from crushing poverty, fleeing war or persecution, or acting on a desire to improve their personal situation and economic prospects, this is already becoming a critical global upheaval issue and a real crisis for our species.

More needs to be done to demonstrate and communicate climate change as the most significant global security threat of our time. We must amplify the voices of security experts and those facing instability on the ground and impel the international community to avoid serious armed conflict and prevent the destabilisation of our societal structures and economies.

True leadership is not shaped by short term reaction to single issues, social media comment and political desperation. True leadership tunes out the white noise, pauses, reflects, and then boldly navigates a sound course through the most difficult waters. There is a wealth of untapped potential linked to more proactive environmentally sound investment in green technology, job creation, and energy independence that will deliver financial savings and enduring security. It is time for our leaders to galvanise, mobilise our intellectual armies, and commit resources. Now more than ever a collective effort is needed to identify the opportunities we must begin to enable today to ensure our long-term environmental security.





# Empowering girls through education: a global imperative

In the present age, it's disheartening that millions of girls still face significant barriers to education. These obstacles, ranging from deeply ingrained cultural norms to the harsh realities of climate change and conflict, demand our immediate attention. There is an urgent need to address this issue, and to assess the transformative power of education, international examples, and its profound positive impacts on societies and nations.

My personal journey of being married off at a young age and denied the opportunity to complete my education, only to return to it later and complete an MBA, which then led me to build a highly successful career whilst breaking through societal barriers, exemplifies the transformative potential of education in surmounting societal impediments.

## Girls' education: a global crisis

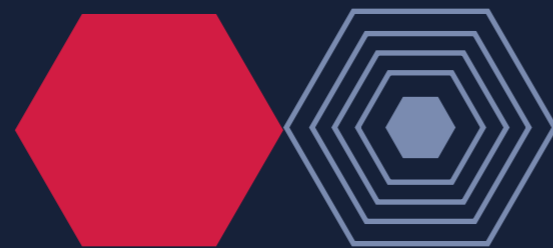
The issue of girls' education has profound implications for entire communities and nations. Education is globally recognised as an indispensable human right and a cornerstone for empowering girls and women. Yet, girls continue to confront an array of educational barriers, including poverty, gender discrimination, and early marriages. This bleak reality condemns them to a lifetime of missed opportunities and constrained potential, making our world poorer for it.

## Breaking down barriers

Premature marriages further exacerbate this crisis, relegating education to a low priority. As a result, countless girls are denied their right to education, stifling their personal growth and hindering their contribution to society.

Inadequate infrastructure and learning environments also hinder girls' education. For instance, in many developing nations, girls drop out of school due to the lack of basic sanitation facilities, particularly during menstruation. According to UNESCO, one in ten girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school during their menstrual cycle. In Somalia, drought worsens these educational barriers as children are displaced, schools are destroyed, and water scarcity disrupts daily life. Often tasked with fetching water, girls face a challenging dichotomy between education and household responsibilities.

The situation in Afghanistan is a glaring example of the challenges facing girls' education. Political instability, economic uncertainty, educational disparities, sexual violence, and poor health plague Afghan women and children. The recent ban by the de facto Taliban government saw 1.2 million denied access to college and secondary schools. As of February 2023, UNESCO reports that 2.5 million school-aged girls and young women in Afghanistan do not attend school, underscoring the gravity of the issue.



## Shazna Muzammil

Conservative parliamentary candidate and a local councillor in Milton Keynes. She was recently recognised for her work in education in Sri Lanka, receiving a global award for Social and Women Empowerment.



## STEM and ICT skills

The significance of STEM and ICT skills in Africa has grown exponentially due to the advent of the fourth industrial revolution, which has ushered in numerous new job opportunities in these domains. Consequently, there is an ever-increasing urgency to ensure that girls have equitable access to and engagement with these areas. Work is taking place to provide girls with the opportunity to receive mentorship from female role models and gain exposure to cutting-edge 21st-century digital skills such as artificial intelligence, coding, robotics, 3D printing, and more. For example, this summer a transformative initiative led by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and Prada allowed over 200 Kenyan girls to participate in specialised ICT-STEM boot camps.

Despite their undeniable association with progress, women and girls continue to be significantly under-represented in STEM and ICT careers. This gender disparity is a global issue, as evidenced by the International Telecommunication Union's Facts and Figures report for 2022, which reveals that girls still lag behind boys in terms of possessing digital skills on a global scale. Furthermore, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in its 2019 report, highlighted that women account for only 29.3% of scientific researchers worldwide. This highlights the pressing need for concerted efforts to rectify this gender imbalance in STEM and ICT fields and harness the full potential of girls and women in these vital fields.

## Initiatives for change: the role of nations

In Bangladesh, the success of micro finance institutions like Grameen Bank, founded by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, was significantly propelled by women's education. Women who received education through such programs were better equipped to manage financial resources, leading to improved family income and poverty reduction.

Rwanda, often celebrated for its commitment to gender equality, has made significant strides by investing in girls' education. As a result, women now occupy prominent roles in politics and leadership, making Rwanda an exemplar of gender parity.

In India, the 'Kishori Vikas' program aimed at educating adolescent girls in rural areas has not only improved literacy rates but has also had a positive impact on the overall development of these communities. Girls educated under this initiative are actively participating in community activities, promoting sustainable development.

## Government commitments: the UK's Girls' Education Strategy

Governments are acknowledging the pivotal role of girls' education. The United Kingdom has been a prominent advocate for girls' education globally, recognizing it as a vital tool for empowering individuals, fostering gender equality, and promoting economic growth. The UK government's Girls' Education Strategy, recognizes education as a fundamental human right and a potent instrument for poverty alleviation, improved health outcomes, and economic growth.

UK aid has significantly contributed to expanding access to education for girls in some of the world's most underserved regions. By investing in infrastructure, scholarships, and targeted programs, UK aid has helped bring more girls into classrooms.

## Investing in a brighter future

Investing in girls' education is a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. Educated girls and women experience improved health outcomes, increased workforce participation, and are better equipped to uplift their families and communities. It is high time we recognize that empowering girls through education is not just the right thing to do; it is the smartest investment for a brighter future for individuals, communities, and entire nations.

# Balancing values with realpolitik: LGBT+ rights in international affairs

Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if my family hadn't left Uganda after Idi Amin's expulsion of Indians in 1972.

My parents and grandparents spoke fondly of their time living in the former British protectorate – the balmy weather, trips to Lake Victoria, a fusion of Indian-East African cuisine with cassava and plantain. The language we speak at home is a reminder of that time – the words I use for 'pillow' and 'iron' are Swahili, very different from the Gujarati I learnt at Saturday school. For many years we spoke about going back on a family trip so I could better understand the roots of my ancestry.

But when I decided to be more open about my sexuality in my mid-twenties, I realised I was unlikely to make the trip any time soon. Indeed, the Ugandan government passed a law this year introducing the death penalty for being gay. In response, the World Bank took the decision to quit Uganda, halting new loans in protest at the anti-LGBT legislation, which starkly contradicts the Bank's values. It's a decision which poses significant questions for Western nations, and specifically for future leaders of the West; how do we navigate the intricate balance between ensuring our security and prosperity while upholding our core values in foreign policy?

While recent government actions on international development have cast a shadow over our global leadership, we can still take pride in our strong record on human rights. We have strong values, and our commitment to respecting LGBT+ rights is a core part of this. These should not be shunned in dialogues with international partners. Equally, there is need for sensitivity towards the norms and practices of partner countries who have different cultural values, but still require our support in areas like overseas development assistance, or are important strategic partners to our security and prosperity.

## Rishi Patel

Secretary of the Labour Foreign Policy Group. He is on Labour's Future parliamentary candidates programme. He works as a Senior Adviser at a communications and policy advisory for change-makers.



Colonialism casts a long shadow where we need to be mindful that in many countries, anti-LGBT+ laws are part of the ongoing legacy of the British Empire. The Ugandan government viewed the World Bank's intervention as hypocritical and paternalistic. Conversations with friends and family residing in socially conservative countries in the Global South or Arab World often reveal their perception of this type of advocacy as a modern-day colonialism – the imposition of our values on theirs. I have also heard from senior former diplomats and civil servants that we are losing influence to traditional geopolitical partners in Asia and Africa to China and Russia, in part because we seek to promote LGBT+ rights at multilateral institutions like the UN.

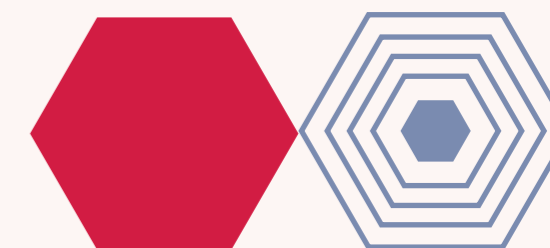
And cack-handed interventions aren't always welcomed by local LGBT+ activists, either. The LGBT+ rights activist Peter Tatchell's one-man protest during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar drew widespread press attention, but some Qatari LGBT+ rights activists were critical of his actions, which they said risked a backlash from state authorities. In international diplomacy, I am learning that pragmatism often dances awkwardly with idealism.

The realpolitik is that, in the medium term, we are going to have a situation where we build more partnerships with countries in the Global South who have challenging human rights records. We need to decide how to balance that reality with our own deeply-held values. And to put it crudely, when people in the Global South are fleeing conflict, dying from famine or suffering natural disaster, it would be counter-productive, not to say callous, to refuse to help. Indeed, when I visited the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan with the Coalition for Global Prosperity, I did not feel that the displaced children there whose education and livelihoods are being supported by UK ODA money should be denied support because of socially conservative values prevalent in the Arab world.

We have to be honest that we are doing this in opposition to Russia and China, whose values are very different to our own. This July, Russia passed their latest law targeting the LGBT+ community, banning trans people from transitioning and thus effectively criminalising their existence. Putin's rhetoric even casts the Ukraine conflict as being about protecting so-called family values. In Putin's War on the West, LGBT+ people are on the frontline.

A solution, to my mind, lies in sustaining our efforts to support local LGBT+ rights organisations in countries where progress is slow, and encouraging businesses and governments to recognise the long-term economic and social benefits of LGBT+ inclusion. Britain still has considerable soft power around the world, and we should leverage it, sensitively but sustainably, in the support of LGBT+ rights everywhere. We also need to know where our line is, and be prepared to take a tougher line when necessary. Uganda's anti-gay laws are reprehensible, and the situation for LGBT+ Ugandans is nothing short of a tragedy. That's why I believe that until the legislation is repealed, the World Bank is right to quit Uganda.

My family left Uganda in 1972, so I grew up in a country where, more or less, it is safe for me to be who I am. No amount of pragmatism should blind us to the reality that, for many LGBT+ people around the world, life is not safe.





# Why pilgrimages to Jordan should be encouraged

In my youth, my parents would often take me to India. There, amidst the plethora of aunties and uncles to meet were regular, and often long, journeys to places of spiritual and historical relevance within Sikhdom. The bumpy hot car journeys to distant sites were a chore for a child, yet in doing them then and growing to appreciate the journey to connect to my religion I grew up both strong in Sikh faith and understanding of the meaning of pilgrimage.

So to be given the opportunity, by the Coalition for Global Prosperity, to visit the site where Jesus was baptised by John, was a special moment of reflection and spiritual uplift. It provided a moment to reflect upon Jordan's special place in the Middle East, as a place of pilgrimage for People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitab) and its recent role in tackling militant Islamists and providing a safe haven for those fleeing neighbouring conflicts.

It is now more than a decade since the Arab Uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa. I remember well the many anti-government protests and armed rebellions that took hold, for as a Sky News journalist at the time one of my regular tasks was to track and produce maps and infographics about where street demonstrations were happening and to source visuals to help tell the story.

## Jay Singh-Sohal

Conservative parliamentary candidate and former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner candidate between 2020–21. He is currently a strategic communications director within the defence and security sector, and a British Army Reserves Captain.



Jordan provided an usual yet intriguing case compared to the likes of Tunisia, Egypt or Lebanon. Its constitutional ruler King Abdullah II dealt with domestic unrest by removing his Prime Minister in February 2011 and creating a Royal Committee to Review the Constitution to address calls for reform. That the Hashemite Kingdom was able to process the concerns of protesters while maintaining its internal stability and political systems is a testament to the King's leadership and Jordanian resilience in the face of challenge or change.

Yet, the country would be tested in far greater ways with the civil war and crisis next door in Syria as well as the rise of a new militant Islamist organisation, ISIS, which found a footing amid the chaos and quickly spread across the Levant. Faced with brutal extremism, Jordan became a key strategic ally for the UK and USA in the fight against Islamic State. I know full well the role Jordan played and just how crucial it was to the alliance against ISIS, as in 2015 I deployed to the country on Operation Shader (Inherent Resolve) working within a highly restricted environment as we sought to degrade the violent extremist organisation.

The result of the fear spread by both Assad's Syrian regime and ISIS was a mass influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan. Thousands of desperate people arrived across the border into North Jordan each night, fleeing both regimes. While 660,000 refugees registered in the country, the total including those who did not declare is estimated to be around 1.3 million. In a country of just over 10 million people with a high unemployment rate of around 22% in 2023, this placed huge strain upon Jordan's public services.

Our partner Jordan has borne the brunt of this strain for far too long. Whilst the UK has given aid and support through NGOs, there are other ways in which we can now support the country and reap the benefits of its unique position of stability and proximity to antiquity. Jordan has immense potential to educate and entertain tourists, from the Roman ruins at Jerash and Amman to the Gulf of Aqaba with its seaside resorts.

Public transport from north to south is a safe and secure venture, offering an increasingly rare taste of the Middle East and Arab life.

That is why we must encourage pilgrimage-based tax incentives to encourage visitors to Jordan's Holy sites, such as the place of baptism of Jesus, and other places mentioned in the Old and New testament. This would boost the local economy through tourism and enable Jordan to create jobs.

The impact this can have is already seen in Pakistan, which has significantly increased its tourism sector over the past decade by encouraging pilgrims to the many sites of significance to Sikhs including the birthplace of our faith's founder, Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji.

What was clear from our CGP Jordan visit is that the country does not require hand outs or goodwill, but the means with which to secure its future both economically and politically. Tourism is the key, pilgrimage-based visitations a sector of growth that the UK should be forward-thinking about and support.

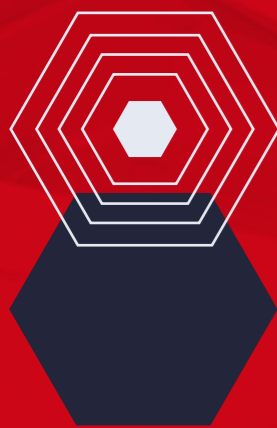
# Why Labour must put development at the heart of a progressive foreign policy

For progressives, the electoral prospects of next year look bright. Heading into an election year, the Labour party is currently leading the Conservatives by 20 points in the polls and have gone from strength to strength in by-election after by-election. And while advisers are at pains to stress that the Labour leadership is anything but cavalier about their chances, the Labour party does increasingly look like a government in waiting.

This means that now is the time to think about how a Labour government might govern and what the policy platform will be. And while it is true to say that elections are not won on foreign policy, it is nevertheless important to think critically about what a progressive foreign policy agenda should look like if we are to have a Labour government a year from now.

In his speech to Chatham House earlier this year, Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy set out the test that will underpin all of Labour's foreign policy choices, which is whether those choices help hardworking families in a world where the barriers between foreign and domestic policy are breaking down. However, where I would argue that there is scope for more ambition is on Labour's vision for international development as a critical part of their foreign policy agenda. A return to spending 0.7% of GNI on official development assistance (ODA) would be a significant step in the right direction, although it is understandable that Labour wants to make this contingent on domestic economic performance given the financial situation they could be inheriting. Yet, the point remains that more could and should be done to set out a more ambitious vision for development as a core component of a progressive foreign policy.

Spending money abroad to support hardworking families at home may seem counter-intuitive, yet international development is one of the most cost-effective ways of investing in British national security, prosperity, and global leadership.



## Libby Smith

Director of Advocacy at the Coalition for Global Prosperity and an executive member of the Labour Campaign for International Development.

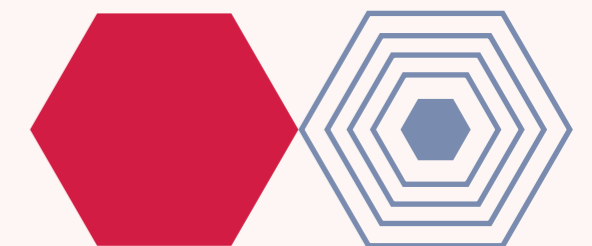


In today's complex world, those that argue we should spend more on the military but cut the aid budget have misunderstood the nature of the threats Britain faces. Our security is threatened by malign state and non-state actors, including terrorism and other dissident groups. We know that investing in communities in developing countries makes it far harder for these groups to gain a foothold and recruit and expand their operations globally. When the UK pulls out programmes in countries like Nigeria or Somalia, this only strengthens groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabab who are only too pleased to fill the vacuum. I was fortunate enough to visit Lebanon and Jordan last year where I saw first-hand the importance of British development assistance in countering the recruitment efforts of groups such as Hezbollah and ISIS. UK aid is helping to deny these extremists a space to flourish which is clearly in all our interest and should be central to any progressive foreign policy.

Utilising development assistance to invest in climate change mitigation and adaptation globally should also be central to any progressive foreign policy platform. This is not just the right thing to do, as the world's poorest communities who have contributed the least to climate change continue to feel the harshest effects of a warming planet, but it is also central to UK future prosperity and security. You only have to look at one of the most contentious domestic policy issues of today, migration, to see how important development assistance for climate change will be. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, unabated climate change could result in as many as 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050. That is compared to a UN estimate of around 117 million displaced people in 2023. If progressives are serious about a long-term and sustainable solution for migration to the UK, such an approach must have development at its heart.

This brings me to consider what a foreign policy platform with development at the heart might look like. A Labour Government should prioritise restoring Britain's global reputation as a soft power superpower and return to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA. Development flies the flag for Britain around the world and a progressive foreign policy should make the most of Britain's global assets. It should also mean a wholesale rethink about how we utilise ODA. We must move away from a situation in which ODA is being used to plug gaps, particularly at the Home Office. Instead, we should invest our aid carefully, strategically and coherently focusing on programmes where we know we can deliver results both at home and abroad. This will include better ring-fencing of core ODA funding, better long-term strategic direction for how and where we spend our ODA funding, and legislating to put core priorities, including climate change, at the heart of our foreign policy.

Crucially, we must not back away from the argument that investing in development is both about safeguarding our domestic interests, but also fundamentally the right thing to do. As David Lammy has stated the goal must always be to have charity begin at home but to not have it end there. Labour has a strong and proud tradition of internationalism and a progressive Labour foreign policy should be unashamed to say as much and thoroughly reject the argument that we cannot be focused on global poverty reduction while also tackling pressing economic issues at home. We can and must do both. That is what it means for Britain to be a force for good in the world.





# Is it too late to stop Jordan running out of water?

Despite neighbouring the immensely wealthy Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan's unemployment is at 25%, it is struggling to support the 1.5 million refugees who fled to the country in the early stages of the Syrian conflict and it has limited natural resources.

It is this third point that is critical to the country's future, because Jordan is one of the most water scarce countries in the world. Annual renewable water resources are less than 100 m<sup>3</sup> per person, significantly below the threshold of 500 m<sup>3</sup> per person which defines water scarcity.

The issue has been brought into sharper focus in recent years due to rapid population growth (Syrian refugees constitute a third of Jordan's population), an increase in regional tensions preventing infrastructure projects being delivered, and over abstraction, caused in part by illegal wells that are supporting a growing trade in black market water.

Inevitably it is the vulnerable who are and will be most acutely affected by Jordan's water shortages, particularly those in the refugee camps of Za'atari and Azraq.

What is more, destabilising Jordan's ability to provide refuge for Syrians has the potential to trigger a mass movement of people towards Europe and create an immigration crisis across the continent and the UK.

The impacts of climate change are also exacerbating Jordan's water scarcity issues. Rainfall has decreased and longer, hotter summers are shortening growing seasons for farmers.

I saw this for myself when visiting the site where John the Baptist is said to have baptised Jesus. Our guide showed us a spring near to where John the Baptist was thought to have lived. Up until very recently the water was still flowing, but that day it had completely run dry.



## Tessa Tucker

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There are inspiring stories of Jordanians working hard to tackle the crisis, like Esraa Tarawneh, a female engineer who is developing hydrological and analytical modelling to predict changes in water patterns. There are also water conservation and education programmes run by UNICEF that are making a difference, but central to the country's strategy for responding to the crisis is the need for investment in critical infrastructure.

There is a plan to build a desalination plant near Jordan's only port of Aqaba, the so-called 'National Conveyance Project', where desalination would allow seawater to be used for drinking, irrigation or industrial purposes.

Once treated, water would be pumped to Amman from the Aqaba plant via a 450km pipeline using renewable energy.

But uncertainty around the project is creeping in. The deadline for capital funders to bid for the project has been pushed back, and global supply disruption and inflation are said to be impacting investor confidence over the financial viability of the project.

So what else can Jordan do? In the past it has turned towards Israel for support with tackling water resources issues.

The so-called Red-Sea-Dead-Sea canal was intended to transfer seawater to the Dead Sea and generate hydroelectric power. However, as well as significant environmental concerns associated with the canal, it was hampered by governmental issues in Israel and an increase in diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

It is not a stretch to foresee similar hurdles for a current proposal, where Jordan would build a massive solar farm that will generate energy for Israel in return for desalinated water. Although a letter of intent has been signed, the current political climate in Israel and tensions within the region means that this is far from a done deal.

There is hope on the horizon in the form of a recent announcement from the World Bank, which has approved US\$250 million to upgrade Jordan's water distribution networks, and international commitments to support the costs of the National Conveyance Project.

But some say the problems are baked in. It is too late. The effect of climate change is already apparent, people are already facing water rationing and the infrastructure required will take too long to deliver.

I disagree; these factors just mean the international community must act promptly and demonstrate it is committed to helping deliver the infrastructure Jordan needs.

The humanitarian, economic and geopolitical impacts of Jordan's water crisis are potentially huge, so helping Jordan to keep the taps running has never been more critical.

