



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org.uk
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org.uk

Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

Reviewing a Distinctive UK Foreign Policy

Bob Ainsworth MP

House of Commons

Baroness Falkner of Margravine

House of Lords

Lord Hannay of Chiswick

House of Lords

Chair: Dr Robin Niblett

Director, Chatham House

19 July 2011

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Dr Robin Niblett:

Ladies and gentleman, welcome to Chatham House. Thank you very much for joining us this morning. It is a busy day, but not so much in St. James' Square, so if you want a quiet time, this is probably the place to come to at the moment. We are launching our second Chatham House-YouGov survey on British attitudes towards the UK's International priorities today. It's pretty much a year exactly since we launched our first survey on this front and I suppose it is almost ironic that we are doing it on the day that domestic issues are sort of blowing up on the other side of Westminster and maybe that's something we might end up commenting on in terms of relative priorities. Just to remind everyone, this meeting, perhaps self-evidently is on the record and if I could ask you to make sure mobile phones are switched off, that would be fantastic.

I am delighted to have three such distinguished and well-placed panellists to comment on to comment on the survey and really just engage in a discussion about it for just the next hour or so. They are not exactly the same three people we had advertised. It may be that actually we are fortunate to have such well-placed people with us today. We may even be better placed in some respects than we were initially. But either way, I did want to note here that in Bob Ainsworth, Baroness Falkner and David Hannay, we have three people who bring I think a very interesting mix of a domestic ability to think about international affairs as well as international.

Bob Ainsworth, as you all know, was Secretary of Defence under the Labour government, but I would note as well that he held positions in the Department for Environment, Transport and Regions, in the Home Office as well and obviously was responsible as Minister of State for Armed Forces during his time most recently in government. Baroness Falkner is the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice in the House of Lords, but again I would note that she's served twice as Liberal Democrat spokesman for the Home Office. Also, previously, for Justice and also at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office if I've got this right. And also she was Director for International Affairs and Director for Policy for the Liberal Democrats in the House of Commons and has worked also as the Commonwealth Secretary, so again brings a good broad range of experience and insight. And David Hannay, Lord Hannay, I think known to you all here, served both as Permanent Representative to the European Union, also as the UK's ambassador to the UN. Very knowledgeable on the EU having been involved at earlier stages and getting us into the EU, helping us get into the EU, but also having spent time in the British Embassy in Washington DC and has held

a number of high level panel positions for the UN – Special Representative to Cyprus, as well on the UN High Level of Threats, Challenges and Change which reported at the end of 2004.

I am not going to provide a synopsis right now, of the key points. You have copies right now of the survey with you – not that I hope you will spend the time quickly reading through parts of it this instant. What I'm going to do is try to tease out some of the points in the discussions and the conversation with our three panellists and also with you as our audience. You'll have a chance obviously to pose your questions and engage in the discussion. We did organize this... when you have this much data – and we had more data than we did last year and in a way, we are testing out how we survey British attitudes to international affairs – I was trying to think, how do you organize an analysis? The way we've done it here in the document that you have in front of you is a way to test a concept of a distinctive foreign policy. The coalition government has laid out this idea of a distinctive foreign policy. I provide a synopsis about how I interpret that distinctive foreign policy and then have organized some of the data around those points.

But you can find not only this document on our website with one minor correction on it, but also you will find on the website at chathamhousesurvey.org, a particular page where you can actually dig in to all of the data if you want to. And I'm told by some of my folks at Chatham House you can kind of pick things by age groups and gender and so on and so forth because we've been very fortunate to partner again with YouGov and YouGov Stone, the sort of two halves that allow us to do this general public survey, over 2,000 people in the general public and over 800 opinion formers. And David Hannay was asking me earlier, 'You know, I wasn't asked. Am I an opinion former?' I wasn't asked either actually and maybe I'm an opinion former. What they do though is they've selected over 800 people who reflect a number of backgrounds in particular in business, media, politics, academia, science, the arts.

It is not meant to be an elite foreign policy group that one is comparing to a general public group. It is, say, a more informed or interested most probably public versus maybe a less interested, general – as one calls it – public. On the latter group, the general public, the great thing about the survey if you go into the data parts, is it's broken down by age, gender, social class, party political affiliation – which becomes particularly interesting at the moment – as well as region and there is a question in there about Scotland, Scottish independence, which you may want to seek out for those of you who are interested. But in any case, we will be able to go into more depth into this.

I invited three people to give some comments at the end – Mark Malloch Brown, Sir Jeremy Greenstock and Peter Kellner of YouGov and at the end you will find their takes on this and also, I was lucky that a number of colleagues at Chatham House squeezed some time out of their busy schedules – everyone has busy schedules but they do as well with all we've got going on before the summer break – to do some little comments on how they took a particular angle and I found those to be very interesting indeed.

I do want to, before I sit down now and engage in some conversation, thank two people in particular who helped crash course this to get ready for the deadline, the 19 July: Jonathan Knight and Michael Harvey who I think are both here. Michael and Jonathan, thank you very much. Long nights as well as days trying to get this data into a shape that's right and where we haven't put the wrong figure and the wrong percent in the wrong place, but very helpful on the analysis as well and I did want to recognize their great help on this as well as obviously YouGov.

So let me sit down and get into some discussion. I feel like I'm doing a Newsnight step-around-the-room here. So what I thought I'd do, just to kick off here, is give each of our panellists here a chance to maybe just to give some first impressions of what struck you the most. And if I could invite Kishwer, you first to make some comments – the two or three things that struck you the most in the beginning and then we will have a chance to dig more deeply into the points as we go along. But what two or three things jumped out at you first of all in the survey?

Baroness Falkner:

Could I start first by setting the record straight? I'm now back doing Foreign Affairs since the coalition was founded so I've left Justice behind me.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Even better. Perfect.

Baroness Falkner:

First of all, can I start by – I'm sure that everyone will agree – thanking you for this survey because it illuminates in a very specific way, casts a search light on things that are quite important to us as a country, but that we don't get quite the accurate picture that we should in the different sectors of the establishment. So I think it's very helpful in putting together a lot of different trends.

I think the things that jumped out at me – three big things I think. One was this view that we do very badly as a country, the United Kingdom, in terms of our relations with the European Union and it was very interesting to see that actually we – public attitudes and opinion former attitudes – on the whole are pretty positive towards the EU. Mark Malloch Brown, for those of you who have read it, sort of unfairly digs at the coalition and suggests that foreign policy differences in the coalition are huge and so on. I would disagree with that, not least by saying to you where we were a year ago. A year ago, when the coalition was formed, some 13 months ago, I think there was some trepidation on both sides of the coalition as to where foreign policy would take us because the potential for discord was significant on the European Union, on human rights and intervention and multilateralism across the board. And, in fact, if you look at the survey that hasn't really materialized at all. So it's one of the surprise stories I think it's fair to say when I speak to Lib-Dem ministers, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and so on as to how well we work together and how significant the cross-influences are on one another.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Although Kishwer, I think, if I could just quickly make the point, I mean, the EU as an institution was ranked predictably low. Ninth out of all of them and in terms of where we are spending our money – 64 percent, think we are spending too much...

Baroness Falkner:

That was very specifically on the EU budget.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Exactly. Whereas I think you are right in saying that in terms of cooperating with the EU, a lot of support.

Baroness Falkner:

Yes, you are right. The other things I think kind of slightly jumped out at me this time in a depressing way was how insignificant a moral and ethical dimension in foreign policy seems to be to the British public. There was a significant disconnect. The public, 68 percent didn't think it was really relevant, very much in our dealings with the rest of the world whereas only 39 percent of opinion formers didn't think this was particularly relevant. And interestingly in the political parties here, the polarization to the extent that it exists was there. The Tories were the most hard-nosed wanting to go out and

conduct foreign policy in the national interest whereas the Lib-Dems, the party I come from, were the most idealistic and felt that that was a very significant area that we should concentrate on.

A couple of other things – there were some contradictions. One of the contradictions that I think leapt out was how the British public and, indeed, the opinion formers rated particular issues as extremely relevant – for example, countering terrorism, international terrorism or sealing the borders, dealing with illegal immigration, resource constraints and so on. These were considered to be really significant. Yet there didn't seem to be a link between the significance of those actions and, for example, natural disasters and the impact that has on resources or failed states – the impact that has on security or the borders with the EU and so on. So again, quite a few contradictions in it.

Finally, I think a couple of small surprises, but nevertheless surprises. The level of anti-Israeli sentiment was extremely significant and clearly Israeli foreign policy over the years as it has moved along and particular under the current government does influence thinking in the United Kingdom and the public. Finally, you would expect me to say something about the Arab Spring. I thought that the lack of enthusiasm about the spread of democracy and the rule of law was, again, notable in terms of the British public and also to some extent among the opinion formers, but that was again on the minus side I think overall. I'll leave it to that and pick up other things.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Thank you very much indeed. Bob, over to you for some key first impressions.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

Well, first of all, thank you, not necessarily for producing the report, but for giving me an opportunity to get away from Murdoch. Important though it is, it's sort of sucking the life out of everything else, isn't it? So a chance to come and talk to people about something else is a welcome break.

Two things – let me just say two things. First of all, I found it quite reassuring that the majority of opinion holders and the general public are sceptical about this change of direction, distinct foreign policy. And, of course, they are right because there's a downside to more continuity in foreign policy – at least, I think there is – than some of the political badging would suggest that there is. I would have thought if you wrote to most of our embassies and posts around the world and you talked to them about the new emphasis on trade, you would find as we were discussing a little while ago, that there is absolutely no

difference to that that they've been doing for a very long time. There is no real change, but there is a good bit of political spin there. We need to be in favour of trade and British self-interests and therefore let's tell everybody there's been a great big change of direction. Well, it seems to me that the majority of people have seen through that and know that it doesn't really exist. Of those who do believe that, they are overwhelmingly against the change of direction and that's not necessarily explained in the report.

I would have thought that it's down to, a large chunk of it is down to Libya and the manner in which the decision was taken rather than the conflict itself. I think that people were very worried about how we got ourselves into an operation and the way in which we did without any real thought about the consequences, about the length of the operation and about its strategic importance to us. So I would have thought that that's impacted on that, but I'm not certain because the survey has no explanation within the text to it.

The other thing that I wanted to just draw out because it impacts on something that I've been talking about in the House of Commons over the last few days. And that is there is a very clear majority among the opinion formers and even bigger among the general public, who want us to remain a great nation and want us to keep our seat on the Security Council, but that contrasts with a high degree of scepticism about involvement in world affairs. So there appears on the one end, there's this desire for us to remain Great Britain but a kind of shrinking back to why are we not trying to look after our own self-interest almost at the borders and I think that contrast is quite worrying. I think it arises from the fact that the political class appear to have great difficulty opening up a genuine debate with the British public about the nation to which we belong and the kind of nation that we want to be. And we don't have that debate for some very sensible reasons, from a narrow political perspective.

William Hague made speeches last year to say that there would be no strategic shrinkage. Well, he has to say that, doesn't he? And yet we've hacked chunks out of the BBC World Service and put it under the BBC itself rather than under the Foreign Office where it will have to compete with funds against East Enders in the future and we are in the process of huge reductions in our military capability. Now, those two things can't be true. We can't cut back on military capability, hard power and soft power as well and yet there is no strategic shrinkage and this is not a conversation we are having with the British public. Bernard Jenkin – who is not a political ally of mine, he's quite a right-wing, Euro-sceptic conservative – just produced a

paper which I agreed to do a forward for called 'The Tipping Point' because we are trying to make people have this conversation.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Thank you. We might want to come back to a couple of these points. I think on the trade policy. It strikes me at least watching this – and I've been in London now for [inaudible] years since being in Washington – but the giant trade mission approach of the government appears to be different. I don't know how distinctive it is, whether it qualifies as a commercial policy. So one point we might want to come back to – whether there really is a different emphasis. It's another question of whether it is successful or not, but whether the emphasis is different. And then the other point I just want to pick up: your note there about the difference between wanting to remain and great nation and wanting to remain sceptical about involvement. Jeremy Greenstock did a very interesting piece at the end there where he talked about the British public's sort of contented passivity almost. He was really quite critical of what he sensed is the opinion so I think picking up very much on your point there.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

And to what degree is trade embedded in our international service as well. I recently visited Brazil with the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. Our ambassador was driving around in a Lexus. There is no way that the German ambassador would drive around in anything other than a BMW or a Mercedes, but he was advertising our green credentials because it was a hybrid car. Well, it's also an iconic Japanese car and we do still produce cars in this country and Brazil is supposed to be one of our main targets for our trade initiative. I found that quite extraordinary.

Dr Robin Niblett:

So a gas-guzzling Range Rover would be a problem maybe? Maybe it's an Indian car.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

Or a Jaguar.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Or a Jaguar. Exactly. Another Indian car.

Baroness Falkner:

American. American-owned.

Dr Robin Niblett:

David, over to you with some first impressions.

Lord Hannay:

I thought your opening remark about the great soap opera across the park was a reminder to all of us that the British public is very easily distracted from the intricacies of foreign policy to the delights of the soap opera and that is a reminder, I think, that if you had ranked your inquiries along with health, education, welfare and so on, they would have come very low so I think we always have to bear that in mind.

Secondly, it did strike me also that if you divide foreign policy up as YouGov and you have quite reasonably enough done – some very precise questions and got some quite precise reactions – you do underplay the interconnectivity of all these issues and you a bit play up contradictions which are perhaps more apparent than real. Just to give you an example of that, there was a very strong response, both by opinion former and the general public, about terrorism and internal security. And yet, there was a dislike of the European Union, a dislike of the actions that one might suppose were a complicated way of dealing with internal security, ie they didn't really understand a report that I was involved in quite recently about internal security said simply Britain's internal security neither begins, nor ends at the water's edge. That's a pretty simple concept, but it involves bridging a lot of the questions that you asked and that sort of splits them apart.

I was sort of startled, frankly, about the attitudes to the Arab awakening. I prefer to call it that than the spring. It doesn't lead on to autumnal conclusions. The Middle East and all that's going on there from Libya onwards... I really don't think that people who answered that, correctly in my view, that natural resources and energy are a key vulnerability of this country, and that migration and policing our borders is very important, could have perhaps appreciated the extent to which these issues are linked to what happens now in the Middle East. And that a purely passive attitude of saying we are not very interested in what's happening is not likely to produce very good results, frankly. Whether you are talking about the peace process – the Arab-Israeli peace process – which is now very static, hardly existent. And yet, if we don't take an interest in it, we are going to find ourselves with worsening relations with these democratically emerging Arab countries who will attach

importance to it somewhere down the line even if they don't immediately now. So I think that there is a lot in this survey which is very worthwhile looking into but some bits that need to be glossed quite a bit.

Dr Robin Niblett:

The contradictions are definitely something that stands out for me having read the survey and I'll just note some of the points that I'm going to make in the conclusion in a minute because it might serve as a point of discussion in a second. But also I think what is interesting in the survey is some of the breakdown by parties. Not always in terms of contradiction, but one of the questions we ask is, generally speaking, do you think British foreign policy has enhanced or damaged Britain's reputation abroad or made no difference? Obviously, as you expect, most people haven't really focused much on it that so you have over 50 percent in the 'Don't Know' or 'Neither' category. But you only have 6 percent enhanced and you have 40 percent damaged. But the point I want to make on this is that what's interesting I think is the conservative side which has generally been quite supportive of aspects of foreign policy in other specific areas, when they are asked this big question, the Conservative [inaudible] is very low and I get this impression that perhaps the government has had some difficulty bringing its own side. The Conservative Party has had difficulty...

Lord Hannay:

Don't you think that is perhaps also a link to the fact that one of the most unfashionable policies that you raise was the ring-fencing of overseas aid which, in my view, has greatly enhanced Britain's standing around the world, but I imagine that most of the people who said that increasing aid was a bad thing were unwilling to recognize that it had had this benign effect.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Absolutely and didn't see, I think as Bob was saying a minute ago, the potential connection between what happens far from our shores and the kind of security inside. On climate change, as well again, we have this very large number on the Conservative side – I think around 40 percent – who say it's just not an issue at all. You shouldn't really give focus. You want a coalition government potentially putting forward policies of this sort that would seem joined up from the opinion former standpoint, but from a public and a conservative stand point, in particular, almost goes against the grain of some of that voting tension, both in foreign aid and also on climate change.

Maybe we could open another round of topics? I was wondering what you made of the [inaudible] of the trade policy is the focus on bilateral relationships with new countries and again some quite interesting statistics in the poll on whether we should be strengthening or weakening our ties with particular countries. As well as questions to be asked to try and see what was the public perception here and mostly, if you look at that chart – it's a kind of keep-it-roughly-the-same with a modest let's-get-closer, say around the 20 percent mark, 18 percent in India, Russia, Brazil and maybe 7 or 8 or 10 percent let's make it weaker. But 50 percent or so on keep-it-the same. The one that isn't is China where you've got something like 38 percent closer. The numbers are all in here. I haven't memorized them all at this point. You know, 35 percent the same. I mean, a really quite different view on China. Any thoughts or explanations on this or any other point you want to make on the countries in particular?

Baroness Falkner:

I think one of the interesting thing about that because in terms of what we said human-to-human relations, the British public are not terribly close to Chinese people. There is a very low ranking in terms of rating China, probably because of its human rights and monolithic structure that it seems to have. But of course because when you looked at the security issues in terms of the general public, because they see economic security, financial markets, resource depletion, prices of things, openness of supply routes, supply side, constraints being a threat – when they see all of those, then naturally China goes way up the scale with the diminution of importance of the US and a rise in the importance of China and that's logical to me. That means that the public are rather better informed and clearer in their view of where their priorities lie than perhaps sometimes than the opinion formers are.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Yes, I think on the international business, it was interesting to note – again, we are testing this kind of trade part or business part – both the public and the opinion formers had promoting international business up in the third of the 10 or 12 priorities and certainly the opinion formers, when asked what was the biggest threat we are facing, placed financial crisis right at the top, I mean way up above other levels. The general public maybe hadn't quite put that at the same level at this stage but there did seem to be sensitivity to economic issues and I presume they associate China with all the answers to this at this point.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

I'm not sure if the general public are ahead of the opinion formers when it comes to their opinions with regards to China. I just think that China, China-awareness has just gone up considerably in recent years. The Olympics and a lot of other issues have been you know at the forefront of people's minds whereas opinion formers will know that the Brazilian economy is growing like mad. The Turkish economy likewise is doing very well. I'm not so sure that the general public are really aware of how countries like that are doing and the capacity for increased trade relations with them.

Lord Hannay:

The general public reaction tends to be on a radar screen that doesn't look very far ahead. I mean, anybody who believes that at the time the World Cup is taking place in Brazil and the Olympic games in the next five years, we won't be doing a lot more with Brazil and know a lot more about Brazil, I'm sorry. They haven't got a very far reaching radar screen and I think will inevitably go up in sensitivity and interest in this country in that period because that's the way our communications industry is structured.

On China, I think it is quite perceptive actually that people are interested and find China important because it links with the other view that Britain needs to retain its place in the world, its membership in the Security Council and so on. And that, of course, brings straight up against the Chinese issue because China is a permanent member of the Security Council and has a veto and therefore China is undoubtedly going to play a bigger role in world affairs so that brings it into rather sharper focus, I think, for British people than a country that is not a permanent member of the Security Council.

You then raise the whole issue about is China going to be a country with which we can work successfully on world problems or is it going to be more an adversary than a friend. And that is an interesting and important issue which I'm sure your subsequent survey are going to go into in greater and great depth. I don't believe myself that the Chinese have taken any definitive view of that themselves. I think there are many schools of thought in Beijing between those who think that they are very nationalist and mercantilistic approach is the right one for China which would be damaging for this country or whether they think that a stakeholder, international, top-table player approach is the right one. If I had to make a guess – and this is an appalling diplomats cop out – I suspect we will have a bit of both.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Well, Kerry Brown made a very interesting point, you'll spot there in the analysis of the great powers on Chinese soft power where his conclusion is that soft power is more effective. People are actually kind of interested in China, not what you said here. So when the Chinese government gets involved in trying to promote what it is that China is trying to achieve that things go in the opposite direction. His conclusion is the Chinese government shouldn't get involved in that and just let gravity have its own effect.

I wanted to pick out four of the kind of contradictions. We talked a little bit earlier about contradictions that were kind of in here and then use that as an opportunity to get some comments or questions in from the floor and then be able to take those around our panel here. Just to go back to one of the points we talked about here, that the public and opinion formers both rate promotion of British business abroad and trade as a top priority – top three as we said a minute ago – but they are still quite ambivalent, China aside, about most of these countries. Maybe unknowledgeable, maybe the point, but as the government shoots forward, I would argue I think on more bilateralism and a little bit of a rebalancing away from a Euro-Atlantic focus. The public are quite a long way behind and if things were to twist a little bit or turn a little bit in that bilateral relationship,

The government's not going to have very good ground to stand upon and we've seen already with Saudi Arabia which comes now on the countries which you feel outside the EU you feel most unfavourable towards is fourth, above Israel. It's something for the government to try to focus with and balance.

Second point, I think this is Bob's point, all responded strongly supporting British armed forces, more money for equipping them, but then they don't necessarily rate very highly the threats that the armed forces are designed to fight. So we want them well-equipped. We think they are the most valuable thing for our reputation, but don't send them places. Or maybe they don't trust them where the government has sent them in the past. And we could talk about this. Better for defence than defending further away from the goal line as you said, Bob.

And then this idea of scepticism about the EU as an institution, but David, you may want to say something about this later on, very supportive of working with the EU closely on a whole range of topics, Conservative as well as Lib-Dem, including defence where you've got 63 percent of the general public working closely with the EU on defence and only 26 percent not. Now again, David, I know you've got a way of interpreting this language and maybe I'll let

you come in on that. And finally this idea of a country that is crushing, as you said Kishwer, about the idea of promoting values as part of British foreign policy but is very proud of the institutions that can do that. The World Service is just off the top of the map of one of the most influential institutions for the opinion formers and pretty high on the public. You know, English as a language, universities, all rated very highly as the assets that the country has at its disposal. But the idea that we would actively push or promote, very sceptical. So just a few points for us to come in on. As you think of questions, David, what's your view on this? You work a lot. I see you've been working through this bill as I think Kishwer, of you as well, on the EU. This contradiction between the EU as an institution we love to hate and it's pretty across the board of the opinion formers as well, but at the same time, very high marks – really, higher than the US on most cases – on working with the EU.

Lord Hannay:

Well, I think part of it is a result of the pretty unremitting deluge of antagonism which you get in the press about the EU as an institution and I'm not -- that's not a Murdoch point I'm making because the Daily Express and the Daily Mail are, if anything more hostile even than the Murdoch papers. But that unremitting diet which has been going on now for about 15 years – and I would rapidly say was preceded by an unremitting diet of the opposite kind, a very positive kind in the years from about 1970 to the early 1980s...

Dr Robin Niblett:

Unreasonably so or, equally, unreasonably so?

Lord Hannay:

I'm not arguing whether it is reasonable or unreasonable. Just merely drawing the conclusion that it is very difficult to imagine that there would be a positive view when there is so much unremitting negativism around, but when you break it down into individual issues as your survey has done and ask people whether they think they should be working with other Europeans in these fields, they tend to give you what I think is an un-ideological, common answer – 'well, yeah, sure'. And so you do get some quite puzzling answers there, but it's not surprising in a way that if we are cutting back on our armed forces, we are realizing that, as the government's own strategy said quite categorically, in the future we were always going to have to act with other people. We weren't going to be conducting military operations on our own. We weren't going to be dealing with a situation in a failed or failing state on our own. In

that case, you've got to obviously have a view about which partners you can most usefully work together with both technically in terms of interoperability, but also politically. And that brings you back of course to the United States and Europe who are not a choice between them, but of course, in most cases, we will want to be working with both of them. And that is what we are finding ourselves doing, of course, in Libya. So I think there is a lot of support for that kind of approach and I think that perhaps explains the contradiction in the EU findings.

Dr Robin Niblett:

It's interesting on that point again. I've had the benefit of having looked at these numbers a bit more. Working with the EU on foreign policy comes last, but on military operations potentially higher. It's this idea that we're not quite sure we agree. It's the utilitarian approach to the EU you might say rather than the conceptually knitted one. Let me give a chance. If anybody has a question or a thought either about the poll or about the comments that have been made by our panellists or would like to raise a point in the context of it?

Question One:

Lord Hannay, you mentioned that a passive attitude to the Arab Spring won't produce good results, but I would like to ask what is the point in the public taking an active, intelligent, informed interest in foreign policy when it can't influence it? If it wants to stop a war, how can it do it? We found that we couldn't with Iraq. If we want to stop the war in Libya, what are we supposed to do? Write to our MP? The Foreign Secretary? Who? Are they going to take any notice of us?

Dr Robin Niblett:

Very broad question and I was challenged by one of my colleagues here to think a little bit about it. Does it matter? Should you take a public opinion poll on foreign policy or is that a space where the government generally kind of goes well I have room here to do what I want and I'm worried a bit about opinion formers, but in any case, Kishwer, you're in the middle of all this.

Baroness Falkner:

I disagree with you a little bit about the Iraq War because I come from a community that you would have expected us – a Muslim community – to be most opposed to the Iraq War as it would be. Yet, when it came to the 2005 General Election, and I campaigned up and down the country, lots of towns

and cities with large Muslim populations, it just wasn't an issue. So if there had been a genuine desire on the part of the British public to get out of Iraq, that wasn't evident. They had an opportunity at the opinion polls. They choose not to exercise that opportunity. Only one seat changed hands on the basis of a war and that is extraordinary. Only one seat – George Galloway's seat and that was it.

I think the British public does influence British foreign policy. In terms of war and peace, elected politicians – Bob would be perhaps the person to comment on this – are acutely sensitive to their mailboxes. They do influence, even if they are in opposition, they do influence the debate that takes place in political circles and there is huge pressure on elected politicians to do something about whatever the problem is. I thought that the contradiction that David referred to a minute ago about the pragmatic attitude, the can-do attitude towards choosing specific areas and leaving other ones alone is the contradiction between the past... the cosy idea that Britain should remain a great power. I mean the term 'great power' is almost slightly anachronistic now. Yet the pragmatic attitude was the recognition that we are a middle-sized power, using our allies – whether it's the EU for this and the US for that, the US for the hard power, the EU for the soft power or the regional trade issues – this is all terribly pragmatic, down to earth, realistic politics and I suggest, looking at this room full of people here who I know are the more engaged opinion formers and so on, but out there there's evidence here that the public is engaged with those things.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

I just fundamentally disagree with the point that's been made. I think that if anything is lacking in this country it is leadership from politicians, not their inability to follow public opinion. I think the politicians are far too prepared in some circumstances to follow public opinion. You can say, if you wish with the benefit of hindsight about what happened in Iraq, and also if you want to believe that a demonstration of whatever size it was – 400,000 or half a million or whatever – ought to change public opinion, then the British public have no say on Iraq, but I think that's not true. I was a junior minister in the Home Office, drafted into the whip's office at the time to try to deal with the traumatic decision, the massively and rightly traumatic decision that had to be taken about whether or not Parliament supported Iraq. I know of no member of Parliament who wasn't [inaudible] soundings from his constituency, from his local party activists, from his family, from anybody else and felt a huge responsibility when they came to take this decision. So I think the public had a say. I think with the benefit of hindsight, we might think they didn't if we

choose to, but I think the public had a say and I think if there is something that's lacking, it's the propensity to lead, not the propensity to follow.

Lord Hannay:

There is just one other thing I would like to say about that question. We can't stop the Arab awakening for heaven's sake. It's a number of Arab countries acting spontaneously who have brought about a huge shift in the world power structure and the question for us is how do we adapt to it? How do we respond to it? Do we respond in a positive way? Or do we respond in a passive, hunkering down way as the Israeli government has done which in my view mistakenly. That is a key question. We do have to remember that foreign policy is made up of actions by foreigners, awkward people who we don't control and we have to adapt our policy to them, not wish it was otherwise or try to force it to be otherwise.

Now, I don't agree with you about Libya at all. When I heard Colonel Gaddafi describing the inhabitants of Benghazi as cockroaches, I had a nasty recall of what the Hutus, who were massacring nearly a million Tutsis in Rwanda some 15 years ago, called the Tutsis: cockroaches. It's a pretty startling memory and when the United Nations Security Council acting as it should do under the conclusions reached by all 192 members in 2005 – that there was a responsibility to protect people who were not being protected or could not be protected by their own government and gave the authorization for the no-fly zone and the actions in Libya, I thought we were absolutely right to respond.

Dr Robin Niblett:

And obviously the idea of the UN as a proxy almost for legitimacy comes a little bit out – not proxy, it's too strong I'm afraid – but if you go through the UN and you get that endorsement in a way that provides an additional element. We do touch a little bit in the conclusion on this issue. I think the question is whether at a time of austerity public opinion may end up being even more influential or not more influential, but certainly will be influential, something the government will have to take into account. The difficulty is how to resolve the contradictions if you are going to be bringing in that public opinion, that kind of contradiction where the people say this is very important and they don't necessarily vote on it. And one of the points we make in here is that on development spending which, predictably perhaps, gets kind of a beating certainly on the public polling, that how you connect it to internal security has just not happened and how to rephrase it and reframe it around some issues that are credible and real, but where the public does resonate,

which might be immigration. It might be the threat of resources. If less countries are being helped to be more effective in terms of governance and building prosperity at home, we are going to get that lapping of the waves coming onto our shores.

I notice actually, somebody helpfully passed me, the government today has just released a new governance strategy to build stability overseas called The Building Stability Overseas Strategy which in any case may be trying to touch on some of these issues. But again, if you make poverty the top issue, I'm afraid right now in a time of austerity, it doesn't necessarily resonate here, but if you tie it into some of these security dimensions that have resonated with the public than maybe, you've got a bit more leverage.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

To some degree, you are talking too much to the lobby here and not to the public. We are committed to 0.7 percent. What does that mean to my constituents? Nothing at all. We are trying to address poverty. Well, wait a minute. There's a lot of poverty back at home in Coventry Northeast is their reaction to that and we need to react to what the consequences of the horn of Africa are going to bring to our own security, to immigration if we want to win people over – the real public and not just the lobbying organizations.

Question 2:

Bob Ainsworth, you took a swipe at William Hague's distinctive foreign policy, considering it just a slogan. Can I remind you of Robin Cook's slogan about ethical foreign policy and where that led us? Now you mentioned you were in Brazil and you made reference to no sign of switching priorities under this government's policy. Did you not notice the switch to the trade and industry side of our embassy consulate's general, the open of new professional posts in cities in that country? And on the matter of the Lexus car, isn't it the case that particular car was procured under the policy of your own government?

Bob Ainsworth MP:

On the later point, I don't know, but I do know he's still driving around in it and I do know that that's quite offensive to me and the government is saying that trade is our top priority for Brazil. I think that Robin tried to badge foreign policy and got a good pasting for trying to do so. It was believed that there was a far bigger change than in reality there was. I think William Hague is trying to do exactly the same. I think there is an enormous amount, inevitably, of continuity in foreign policy when governments change, but politicians want to jump up and down and say; 'We're new. We're different. We have a

different set of priorities'. So they stick badges on this that exaggerate the changes. I think the British public have seen through it in the reactions that are exposed in this report.

Dr Robin Niblett:

I think there is some element in this issue as well, Bob, of perhaps wanting to engage the public. So how can I engage the public in foreign policy? I need to describe it as something that is different, otherwise it's just continuity which it may be and then I don't get public support and sometimes I get a sense there's a sort of talking to yourself. In other words, maybe this isn't a special relationship. It should be the central relationship. The Americans probably don't really care one way or the other, but we may care about how we talk about it ourselves.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

The other thing is that it is impossible for us to talk directly to the public about foreign policy. I can't just call a meeting in my constituency about foreign policy. I might get one or two members of the opposing parties coming in, but nobody else, I can be certain. That's a big problem. We are talking through the media and you are being guarded with regards to what you say because of the likelihood that what you are saying is just going to be distorted. No shades of gray. It's just going to be the...

Dr Robin Niblett:

And try to develop hooks that maybe you know the media can work off of.

Question Three:

I was wanting to pick up on the points about development and aid and perhaps echoing some of what was said earlier about the British public's views on a whole host of foreign policy issues being slightly contradictory. So three quick points: The first that people think too much is spent on aid. Now, that assumes that people know how much is spent on aid and the evidence is that people don't. People tend to have a widely inflated sense of actually what the aid budget is. We did some polling with Ipsos MORI a couple of years ago and the average response from the UK public was that 10 percent of public expenditure went to aid when the actual number is one percent. So once people are furnished with the facts, once people realize that actually a penny in every pound of public spending is going on to development, they are usually more willing to support the level of commitment that we currently have than they did previously.

A second point, in terms of where people rank poverty and development as an issue, I think a lot of it is about how you frame the question. People according to the poll findings rank it. Behind protecting UK borders, behind climate change, behind hard security, but if you turn the question around and ask how many people think you can tackle those issues in the absence of tackling development, I think you'll get a very different set of answers. Then I think there is a third issue that is worth us thinking about which is we know that the UK public is actually very concerned and interested in these issues. After the US and Ireland, the UK is the third most generous OECD country in terms of charitable giving to international development and humanitarian NGOs. So clearly there is a groundswell of public concern. We are seeing it actually at the moment in response to the east Africa famine. So is the scepticism about aid in fact scepticism about government rather than about development?

Dr Robin Niblett:

Or it could be about government development which is the problem for the government in a way is that OK, we'd rather give it, but when you give it, then we don't trust you giving it the right way. It all goes to the wrong places. But those are very important points and good points to raise.

Lord Hannay:

And those figures that you quoted about what people think we give as opposed to what we actually give are even more startling when you pose the question in the United States where people frequently say that 20 percent of their government spending goes on to overseas aid when it is about 0.2 percent or something like that. It is astonishing how the perceptions vary. But the point which I think is not often understood in this country, is the 0.7 percent of gross national income which is what we are committed to reaching in 2013 is of course a considerably lower figure by 2013 than it would have been if the financial crisis had not occurred. When the pledge was made in 2005, we and all other economists were on a much more positive growth path which would have produced much bigger figures. So the developing world has already taken through the hidden hand of the financial crisis quite a considerable cut and that I think is a point that is often not brought out enough by politicians in defending what I think myself is a pretty courageous and correct decision to stick to the commitment.

Dr Robin Niblett:

And people maybe think of it in pure relative terms rather than in maybe those abstract terms, part of the issue.

Question Four:

William Hague and David Howell have talked about putting the 'C' back into Commonwealth but I'm not surprised, but I can't see the 'C' apart from FCO and High Commissions here in this report. Then I was looking at that and asking the right questions... there is nothing about the UN in this report. Is that because it's completely off the public's Richter Scale? Nothing about the UN or nothing major about the UN. Where is the UN? Where has it gone? Where have the Bretton Woods institutions gone? Were we asking the wrong questions or was the public just not interested?

Dr Robin Niblett:

Can I just give a quick answer to that – because we had to pick which things to put in here and I think I'm right – and I can see Charles thumbing through the report quickly over there – there was a question about ranking institutions that are valuable to Britain and so on which I think is not in the [inaudible]. You will find it in the full results. Interestingly enough, Kishwer, you went and looked at all that because the Commonwealth did very well actually.

Baroness Falkner:

In attitudes in the country rankings, of how countries are viewed favourably, the old Commonwealth – Australia, Canada, New Zealand etc – did right up there at the top. And I think your other part of your question about the Commonwealth overall was reflected in the part that Africa didn't rate very highly. The new Commonwealth on the whole, Africa, didn't rank in people's perceptions. So there was a pattern there.

Dr Robin Niblett:

On the ranking of institutions, there was one done with the UN etcetera. Commonwealth came second, behind the World Health Organization, interestingly enough. This is the one where the UK came [inaudible]. Right, I'm just trying to check if we have any more questions. We are coming right up to time.

Question Five:

I apologize for raising a question that I raised only on Friday in this room or the back of this room, but it seems to me that the low rating that foreign policy has in this report suggests to me that people are not grasping the fact that the world order, the order under United States hegemony, the rule-based order that we've enjoyed – and I'll put that word in inverted commas because some might object to it – that we've 'enjoyed' since the Second World War is crumbling. It is based on two pillars, namely economics and security and it seems to me that it is collapsing and I don't think that people are aware of the dangers of this. It's not going to affect me at the age of 75, but it is going to affect future generations and I think this is something we should treasure, the openness of this and I think we should be bearing this in mind. I may be pre-empting what my part colleague Jeremy Brown is going to say tomorrow but we'll see.

Dr Robin Niblett:

It's half past and I want to give everybody a chance to wrap up. This is a good, big question to be able to take off it because if the US order is crumbling, is the 'contented passivity' – I'm picking Jeremy's point here – the kind of yes we like being a great power, but we'll defend behind our borders. Maybe a little caricature of the whole poll, but that is definitely some of the public opinion thinking. Let me go in reverse order – David, Bob, Kishwer. Do want to use that as a hooking point to conclude?

Lord Hannay:

Yes, I don't think your premise is terribly well-founded, frankly. I think the world order as you describe – though it's more disorder than order – is changing all the time and changing probably a bit more rapidly now than it has done in the past, certainly during the frozen certainties of the Cold War. But I think the idea that the United States is sort of washed up does resist a careful look at the statistics as to where American military is going to carry it as a hard power in coming years. A long way. Where its economy which is going to get back on a growth is going to carry it. So President Obama, seems to me, to have got a rather good grasp of the way that the world order is changing and is trying to adapt his foreign policy to that. Well, we'll see whether he survives next year's presidential election or not, but I don't think we should be looking forward to a revolutionary change in this world order by the middle of this decade or something like that. I think we are talking about a much longer time scale than that and we shouldn't just assume that all the rising powers – India, China, Brazil – are on a totally bump-free, upward

trajectory. There may be quite a lot of bumps along the road. Who knows? That's what foreign policy is there to take account of and to be capable of adapting to. So I think we have a slight tendency in the way that television and the internet have accustomed us to thinking that everything happens by tomorrow morning breakfast time. Well, it doesn't. Quite a lot of things take decades or even longer to occur.

Bob Ainsworth MP:

I do agree with that. I think that there is a propensity to look at the economic problems that confront the United States at the moment and think that they are in an inevitable decline. The underlying strengths of the United States of America are still pretty profound and one can start looking at China and [inaudible] of the massive problems which it confronts which will be a huge problem for us if they don't deal with them by the way. I'm not sure that I would see it as a clear and ready path to hegemony in the near future. But the main problem that I think that we have is that we are incapable within our politics of having a genuine, deep conversation about our place in the world, the role that we can play, the role that we can't play because some people have pretty strange ideas about what we can achieve and what we can't achieve and that kind of conversation just doesn't happen. I think we all of whatever party need to try and promote it.

Baroness Falkner:

I would argue that multilateralism is alive and well, at least if you looked at the filing of the IMF and the scramble it was across the world for the fact that Europe shouldn't get this by default. I mean evidenced to the fact that other countries – Brazil and other Asian countries – are extremely interested in being big players in those multilateral institutions. If you take, for example, climate change which does poorly in this survey in terms of public opinion, that's because of the collapse of Copenhagen and I suggest that in the longer term, as David said, you have to see things in the longer frame – that climate change will only be tackled eventually and comprehensively through multilateralism.

A final thing I'd say about the rise of the Brazil which we give so much attention to. Again, going back to David's point about thinking in the longer term, if you look at per capita prosperity, they are still way, way behind the United States. They've got a lot of catching up to do and certainly the Chinese seem to be embarking on five year plans and economic planning where they don't want an unbridled rush to keep up 10 percent, 12 percent growth figures. They actually want to refocus their economy to stabilize it and to

make it more sustainable. So I think it's going to be a slow burn for change and I think we can still feel relatively confident that the US will very much be in the frame and that multilateralism will prevail. But again, I'm a liberal. I'm bound to be optimistic.

Dr Robin Niblett:

Thank you very much each of you for those comments. Thank you very much for coming today. We can all run back to the BBC or Sky News after this and find out what's going on on the other side. I hope you take advantage of this survey. Dig around it. Root around. Online as well you've got a lot of data to play with there. We will be in a position to start doing more comparative work in the next two or three years as we build up a bit of data and we figure out which kinds of questions sit best and give us the best information. Minor typo on Figure 8 on Page 13, but you'll spot what that is and it's already corrected online and will be corrected in the next set of documents that are coming out.

And finally, importantly, could you please join me in thanking Baroness Falkner, Bob Ainsworth and Lord Hannay. Thank you very much for your time.