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## **Global Britain: a Brexit phenomenon or a repackaging of familiar discourse?**

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## ***Global Britain: a Brexit phenomenon or a repackaging of familiar discourse?***

Thesis MA International Relations: Global Order in Historical Perspective

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## Table of contents:

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Literature review</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Research design</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. <i>Global Britain</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1. <i>Global Britain's</i> policy objectives</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1.1. Sovereignty, Independence &amp; Autonomy</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1.2. Democracy, Justice, Development &amp; Rule of Law</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.1.3. Free Trade, Economics &amp; Entrepreneurship</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4.2. <i>Global Britain's</i> self-conception</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4.2.1. British self-identity</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4.2.2. Britain's new role and place in the world</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5. <i>Foreign policy in a networked world</i></b>	<b>26</b>
<b>5.1. Policy goals in a networked world</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5.1.1. Sovereignty, Independence &amp; Autonomy</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5.1.2. Democracy, Justice, Development &amp; Rule of Law</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5.1.3. Free Trade, Economics &amp; Entrepreneurship</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5.2. British self-conception in a networked world</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5.2.1. British character and identity pre-Brexit</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5.2.2. Adopting role and place to a networked world</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>
Bibliography	40

## 1. Introduction

A new chapter in British foreign policy was ushered in when the people of the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016. *Global Britain* was (re-) introduced by Prime Minister Theresa May (2016b) as an ‘ambitious vision for Britain after Brexit’. *Global Britain* is a rethink and new framework for foreign policy prompted by Brexit. Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union David Davis (2016) complements such a characterization by describing Brexit as a as ‘a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Britain to forge a new place for itself in the world’ and to chart a ‘new course for our country’. Although the term was not without its fair share of opposition, both at home and abroad, the banner of *Global Britain* caught on and became widely adopted in British politics (Daddow, 2019, pp. 1–2). It remained in fashion by subsequent Conservative Party leadership after May left office and was even emulated and adopted by Labour in their 2017 General Election manifesto (Glencross & McCourt, 2018, pp. 582–583).

Foundationally, *Global Britain* is equal part a vision for a future outside of the EU, as it is an echo of the past, however, as it signals a return to a past globally oriented Britain (May, 2017a). It is a formalization and expansion of existing ideas from the Conservative Party on the future role of Britain in the world. Admittedly however, no minister could give a definitive definition when asked to by the Foreign Affairs Committee (2018). Its core tenets are that it stands for a sovereign UK outside of the EU, advocates for free trade, promotes peace and prosperity, and protecting interests of itself and others. Moreover, it is meant to show the world the United Kingdom will not resort to isolationism or adopt an inward-looking attitude (May, 2016b). At the heart of *Global Britain* lies a contradiction; on one hand is the UK trying to open itself up to the world but on the other it is closing itself from the continent (Barber, 2020, p. 219; Glencross & McCourt, 2018, p. 592). It thus seems to be a narrative frame through which this inherent contradiction of Brexit can be legitimized both domestically and globally (Zappettini, 2019).

Despite *Global Britain’s* claims to being a novel framework and new ambitious vision for British foreign policy to deal with the unique challenges and opportunities of Brexit, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2018) disputes these claims to novelty.

After inquiry by the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office states that the ‘strategic foreign policy objectives have not changed’, nor its ‘commitments’ but that it represents an evolvement of its methods to achieving its shift to global contexts. This raises questions like: to what extent did British foreign policy alter after Brexit if its objectives and commitments have remained unchanged? Moreover, is the language of *Global Britain* new compared to pre-Brexit foreign policy? And if so, was rhetoric and language changed due to Brexit? This research shall hence aim to resolve this research puzzle by answering the following question: did Brexit indeed pose a meaningful change of course to British foreign policy discourse or does *Global Britain* merely constitute to a continuation of pre-Brexit discourse?

To answer that question, this research aims to deconstruct the language of *Global Britain* through a comparative discourse analysis and compare it to foreign policy discourse from the immediate pre-Brexit governments under Prime Minister David Cameron. The intention here is thus explicitly not to investigate the effects or effectiveness of *Global Britain*, as its story is still being written but also because this falls outside the scope of this research. Nor shall it focus on documents of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or similar government bodies as, in the words of Foreign Affairs Committee (2018): a singular written definitive *Global Britain* does not exist and is propagated through speeches. Thus, as *Global Britain* exists as a discursive construction, mostly constructed in speeches, this research shall therefore focus on a body of 44 speeches from members of the cabinet – 22 on post-Brexit *Global Britain* and 22 from the immediate pre-Brexit period. The timeframes for both span the duration of their respective Prime Minister: Theresa May (2016-2017, 2017-2019) and David Cameron (2010-2015, 2015-2016).

The structure of this research is as follows: first, it shall provide a literature review of *Global Britain* scholarship with the intentions of embedding this research into a wider field of research into *Global Britain* and British foreign policy. Second, research design, methodology, source and case selection are presented and elaborated upon. Third, an in-depth analysis of *Global Britain* is performed and reveals the three main policy themes: ‘Sovereignty, Independence & Autonomy’, ‘Democracy, Justice, Development & Rule of Law’ and ‘Free Trade, Economics & Entrepreneurship’.

Additionally, the analysis shall show the envisioned role and place in the world which is substantiated by *Global Britain* through its self-identity as a leader and global linchpin. Fourth, along the same lines as revealed in *Global Britain*, the foreign policy discourse of pre-Brexit is investigated. Lastly, it shall conclude by answering the research question by arguing that significant similarities exist, and that *Global Britain* is built upon the groundwork laid before it. *Global Britain* is therefore not a uniquely Brexit-phenomenon but rather a refinement and of pre-Brexit and an adaptation of it to retroactively justify Brexit to domestic and international audiences.

## 2. Literature review

Scholarship on the discourse of Global Britain have viewed it as an expression of British identity and an exercise in role conception, but the exact contents of this supposed self-identity are contested. Two rough main strands of research exist. The first tries to qualify *Global Britain* as an imperial narrative (Połońska-Kimunguyi & Kimunguyi, 2017; Saunders, 2020; O. Turner, 2019) and a second as a ‘global linchpin’ narrative (Daddow, 2019; Parnell, 2022; Zappettini, 2019). Both sides agree that it is an underlying issue of British self-identity which is expressed through the narrative presented by *Global Britain*. Nevertheless, both sides of the argument agree that *Global Britain* is at least in part built upon pre-existing ideas and narratives in British foreign policy.

The first strand provides the clearest narrative in which *Global Britain* is to be fitted. Spearheaded by Oliver Turner (2019) and Robert Saunders (2020), they argue that *Global Britain* is designed not to be actually realistic but designed to maximize support by utilizing people’s nostalgia for forgone imperial times. Imperial imagery, mindset, and associated ideas are still present in the British experience (Deighton, 2002, pp. 100–120). British imperial thought is still very much alive in certain parts of British society (Boussebaa, 2020). Paul Gilroy (2005) extends this argument to argue that these imperial remnants are proof that the UK has never truly come to terms with their loss of its empire and accept their associated decline in standing in the world.

For Turner (2019), *Global Britain* is a component in a (sanitized) autobiographical imperial narrative of Britain. Designed to garner support to sell the domestic public on the post-Brexit future, it was never meant to provide achievable goals. Instead, it constitutes a foreign policy narrative of revival and return to an imperial past. Its imperialism stems from its goal to make Britain ‘global’ again, insinuating that EU/EEC membership stripped the UK of this global outlook. In this view, *Global Britain* longs for the return to times where the UK still enjoyed international authority and influence courtesy of its empire. The project is meant to signal new opportunities for entrepreneurial UK and for them to latch onto this ‘new’ approach. Imperial imagery and imperial memories are thus central in *Global Britain*, without it would have lost its central core of rhetoric prowess.

Saunders (2020) accepts the profound use of imperial imagery, language, and memories but he questions the true nature of Turner's imperial argument. Instead, he argues that the relationship between Brexit, empire and *Global Britain* is too complex to be so directly and inextricably linked. Despite the heavy influence of memories of the imperial past on British political culture and its invocations in its European debate, imperial rhetoric was never exclusively anti-Europe. The legacy of empire must therefore not be conflated with 'imperial nostalgia'. He does acknowledge the extensive use of narrative frames of British greatness which are based on imperial memories but never rely on empire as the reason for past greatness.

The Brexit ideology does this by downplaying the importance of empire and actively *forgetting* empire according to Saunders (2020). Thereby creating a continuity between the past and present as the loss of imperial holdings no longer interrupts British history. Furthermore, it casts Britain both as a major global actor and simultaneously as a small island. It changes the meaning of empire from the source of British power to an expression of it. Therefore, the past greatness of Great Britain was thus not something it was before, but something timeless in its national characteristics and identity. *Global Britain* embodies this narrative of greatness by utilizing imperial rhetoric to emphasize its past greatness, not empire.

Eva Połowska-Kimunguyi and Patrick Kimunguyi (2017) echo this by arguing that *Global Britain* poses a 'paternalistic, neo-imperialist gaze' onto the world as it plays into the British self-identity of global greatness and thus forms a narrative of soft-power empire. They assert that Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Boris Johnson's interpretation and adaptation of *Global Britain* indeed comprises of an imperial vision. For instance, he constructs Africa opposed to Britain through a traditional binary. Britain is portrayed as this innovative, developed, and prosperous versus Africa, which is depicted as vulnerable, underdeveloped, and generally impoverished. It is similar discourse to the colonial and post-1945 period when Africa was given no agency and had to be rescued by British efforts. However, instead of the past 'moral duty', *Global Britain* is supposedly more pre-occupied with self-interests.

On the other side of the debate on the nature of *Global Britain* are those who see it as a 'global linchpin' narrative, with Britain at the centre of a web of links (Daddow,



2019; Parnell, 2022; Zappettini, 2019). The UK ought to be the central linchpin within its circles of influence through which they are able to make deals, trade and act authoritatively globally. This is reminiscent to Churchill's envisioning of British foreign policy as 'Three Majestic Circles' (Cap, 2019). The latter idea being that Britain plays an irreplaceable role at the centre of three interlinked circles: Empire, the United States (US) and Europe (Garrity, 2016; M. J. Turner, 2010). Such a conception of the world allows for conceptual distance between Britain and the European continent through the notion of 'Britain-as-an-island-nation' (Cap, 2019; Daddow, 2019). Moreover, it invites British exceptionalism as it poses the UK as uniquely positioned in the world to fulfil that central role (Cap, 2019, p. 71; Zappettini, 2019, p. 152).

Oliver Daddow (2019) reads *Global Britain* as such an expression of British self-identity and role conception. Through a discursive analysis, Daddow identifies four narrative components which work together to create a narrative of Britain as a detached from the continent. First, it is 'othering' the continent by pitting the distinct 'British' identity, interests and values against those of 'Europe'. Second, the spatiality of islands creates a physical and mental wedge between the two imagined entities of 'Britain' and 'Europe'. Third, the future outside of the EU is constructed as 'bright' in *Global Britain* discourse, implying a certain darkness in EU membership. Lastly, the project wants to recapture Britain's freedom, put the UK back on its 'righteous' path outside of the EU and re-embrace the Commonwealth and the US. This establishes the British identity and the UK in general as distinct in multiple ways, for which Brussels has historically failed to account for.

This distinctiveness is a common trope in Britain's European policy. It is at the centre of the so-called 'outsider-tradition', in which Britain perceived itself as an outsider in the EU because it views itself as distinct from its European peers (Daddow, 2015). Although this tradition led to a lot of self-inflicted and one-sided antagonism with the continent, it has been part of British political discourse for some time but surged after the Brexit referendum was announced (Daddow, 2019; Parnell, 2022). Ultimately, Britain has kept itself at a distance from Europe and the idea of 'Europeanness' (Daddow, 2015).

Daddow (2019) concludes his analysis by arguing that *Global Britain* is a continuation of the 'pragmatic' tradition within British foreign policy. Herein the pursuit of economic and security interests is most important. *Global Britain* pragmatically keeps a 'deep and special partnership' with the EU at the forefront to secure its own interests in Europe. However, at the same time it is made clear that this partnership is implied to not be as important as its relationships with either the Commonwealth or the US. The dominant narrative of *Global Britain* for Daddow (2019) is thus one of recalibration of foreign policy and a return to a global linchpin role.

*Global Britain* for Tamsin Parnell (2022) is largely a national identity narrative. UK politicians have refashioned British history, not unlike how Saunders has argued, to legitimize the UK's past and future role as leader at the centre of a network of relationships. The aim of *Global Britain* is for Britain to regain its role of an international linchpin. They posit that Britain has an ethical responsibility to show leadership due to its diplomatic capabilities of creating balance of power and to facilitate peace. The role of Empire and its associated power has been forgotten in this retelling of history. Only a truly independent and sovereign Britain can fulfil these obligations in this reading.

To credibly project such a global image, Parnell (2022) posits that new strong trade agreements and relationships are required. Its relationship with Europe was therefore transformed from being a *part* of the EU to being a *partner* of the EU. *Global Britain* in this light is a realignment but also a continuation of cooperation between the UK and the EU. However, Parnell (2022) claims the inability of reaching a desirable withdrawal agreement led to an identity crisis as its credibility as a global trading nation was on the line. This resulted in Government officials to increasingly style the UK through *Global Britain* as an 'outsider' and 'supplicant' to both European and extra-European partners.

Similar to Parnell (2022), Franco Zappettini (2019) makes a comparable claim about *Global Britain* but through the theoretical prism of internationalism. Notably, Zappettini (2019) makes a meaningful and important conceptual contribution to this field of research. He makes an explicit distinction between *Global Britain's* arguments and imaginaries. Its arguments are the policy goals and contents, whereas the imaginaries are the rhetorical aspects meant to sell its policy to its audiences.

Conflating these two can lead to opposing and conflicting accounts of its contents, aims and goals. Using this two-planed analytical framework, it becomes clear Turner (2019) has gotten caught up in the imaginaries of Global Britain. This is similar to Saunders (2020) findings.

For Zappettini (2019), *Global Britain* is the embodiment of the paradoxical nature of post-Brexit discourse. It is a tension between both wanting to support the EU for their own self-interests whilst simultaneously leaving it and actively distancing itself from it. This duality is achieved by decoupling the economic elements of the single market from the rest of the political and social aspects and implications of the EU project. On the one hand, the imaginary of *Global Britain* is actively pushing the idea of regaining its liberty and independence by leaving the European Union. It does this through (re)producing discourses of British exceptionalism in which the social and political aspect of the EU project are incompatible with Britishness. Paradoxically this imaginary also underlines the shared values it between it and Europe and wishes to continue to promote and protect them with the EU. Zappettini (2019) asserts the discursive split between EU and Europe to be central to *Global Britain*. Whilst on the other hand, its argument is pleading the case for a preservation of economic engagement with the EU and thus staying *with* Europe. (Neo)liberal internationalistic economic logic drives the argument of *Global Britain's* desire to expand trade outside of Europe whilst maintaining its trade relation with the EU. Brexit in this imaginary space is thus reinforced as both a rupture and a continuation.

A gap in the current literature on *Global Britain* is that it fails to see its embeddedness in a longer line of British foreign policy discourse by probing *Global Britain* only in relation to Brexit or EU membership. Possible continuities and differences between the discourses of *Global Britain* and pre-Brexit foreign policy remain insufficiently considered. Brexit is simply assumed to be a rupture in British foreign policy. Inquiries into Brexit as a rupture or continuity, by for instance Daddow or Zappettini, stay on an abstract level (abstract foreign policy traditions and discursive political and economic rationales respectively) without engaging with the actual language of both *Global Britain* and its precursor. Therefore, this research shall add to the literature on *Global Britain* by questioning its supposed departure in foreign policy

discourse caused by Brexit by comparing it to pre-Brexit discourse. Moreover, this research shall further embed *Global Britain* into the literature on British foreign policy by examining its relationship to its predecessor. Lastly, it will expand on our understanding of *Global Britain* by offering an analysis of its vision based on an expanded and different set of *Global Britain* speeches.

### 3. Research design

To achieve this goal, critical discourse analysis shall be employed to interpret and compare the language used by *Global Britain* to that of pre-Brexit foreign policy. The use of ‘discourse’ here refers to groupings or formations of statements and is interpreted to mean the ‘language in use’, “a form of social practice in which language plays a central role” (Cameron & Panović, 2014, pp. 3–6). Discourses manifest in text which, accepting a broader conception, can either be written, spoken or performed (Fairclough, 1995, p. 4). This research subscribes to the poststructuralists interpretation of discourses as ‘language in use’ as: “practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Moreover, discourses are important sites for study as it is where ‘consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learned’ (Fairclough, 1995, p. 219). Accordingly, conceptions of role, place and identities are be constructed within discourse through discursive processes of ‘othering’, and subsequently be transmitted through them (Hall, 1996, p. 4; Katzenstein, 1996).

Critical discourse analysis is a method that highlights the social, ideological and political dimensions of discourses (Cameron & Panović, 2014, pp. 66). It analyses language to find patterns of latent meanings, sentiments, and ideologies in texts, and reveals the intentions of the producer(s). It does this by not solely focussing on *what* is being said but by also analysing on *how* it is being said. Critical discourse analysis identifies and critically questions the underlying ideological presuppositions of text and how these helps construct a particular discourse. (Cameron & Panović, 2014, pp. 66–68) Equal attention must be paid to what is in the text as to what is absent as both contribute to the subtext (Fairclough, 1995, p. 5).

In the debate on the meanings of *Global Britain*, an important conceptual contribution, which follows this line of thought, was made by Franco Zappettini (2019). He argues that *Global Britain* is best understood through a two-planed approach: its imaginaries and its arguments. Such imaginaries are projective representational discourses of possible worlds and are designed to frame and convince audiences for projects of change (Fairclough, 2003, p. 124). Zappettini’s (2019) dichotomy suggests the existence of two separate discourses, however, this is an incorrect assessment as

both exist within the same *Global Britain* discourse. Both argument and imaginary are co-dependent, playing into one another. Interpreting these imaginaries is thus paramount for understanding how *Global Britain* transmits its ideology and how it cues audiences its audiences. This research will therefore adopt Zappettini (2019) two-planed approach to analysing British foreign policy discourse.

Critical discourse analysis is applied to a corpus of 44 speeches. As *Global Britain* does not have a definitive written counterpart, only speeches were selected for consideration. The understanding of *Global Britain* here is informed by 22 speeches by members of the cabinet during the first and second May ministry (2016-2017 & 2017-2019) (see Table 1). These speeches were selected if they contributed to the construction of *Global Britain*; a mere mention is thus insufficient. The scope was limited to Theresa May's tenure as Prime Minister, thus excluding speech from Boris Johnson's tenure in office to create a direct comparison between pre- and post-Brexit.

At the other end of the comparison, an equal sized body of 22 pre-Brexit speeches have been selected (see Table 2). These speeches met the following requirements: before all else, they were made by a member of the cabinet from either the Cameron-Clegg coalition government (2010-2015) or the second Cameron ministry (2015-2016) in order to keep a direct as possible comparison. Moreover, preference was given to certain departments or years to create an even distribution across the pre- and post-Brexit. 2010 and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office deviate from this ambition as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs outlined the government's vision for its foreign policy in a series of four speeches, thereby skewing the balance slightly. Lastly, the speeches had to be substantial and overwhelmingly pertain to British foreign policy. This excludes for instance Cameron's famous Bloomberg EU speech as this speech concerns the EU and domestic issues.

**Table 1: Speeches on Global Britain:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Speech and location</b>	
1	02-10-2016	David Davis	Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union	Speech to Conservative conference in Birmingham
2	02-10-2016	Boris Johnson	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Speech to Conservative conference in Birmingham
3	02-10-2016	Theresa May	Prime Minister	Speech to Conservative conference in Birmingham
4	14-11-2016	Theresa May	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
5	02-12-2016	Boris Johnson	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>Beyond Brexit: a Global Britain</i> at Chatham House
6	17-01-2017	Theresa May	Prime Minister	<i>The government's negotiating objectives for exiting the EU</i> at Lancaster House
7	26-01-2017	Theresa May	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Republican Party conference in Philadelphia
8	27-01-2017	Theresa May	Prime Minister	PM speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos
9	09-03-2017	Liam Fox	Secretary of State for International Trade	<i>Towards a free trading future</i> at Commonwealth trade ministers meeting in London
10	03-10-2017	Boris Johnson	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Speech at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester
11	04-10-2017	Theresa May	Prime Minister	Speech at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester
12	13-11-2017	Theresa May	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
13	27-02-2018	Liam Fox	Secretary of State for International Trade	<i>Britain's Trading Future</i> at Bloomberg in London
14	10-04-2018	David Lidington	Secretary of State for Justice	<i>Building a global Britain</i> to Chevening Alumni Group in Beijing
15	12-04-2018	Penny Mordaunt	Secretary of State for International Development	<i>The Mission for Global Britain</i> at Wellcome Collection in London
16	23-04-2018	Liam Fox	Secretary of State for International Trade	<i>Global Britain: the future of international trade</i> at City Week in the Guildhall, City of London
17	29-05-2018	Boris Johnson	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Speech at the Lord Mayor's Easter Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
18	21-06-2018	Penny Mordaunt	Secretary of State for International Development	<i>The Great Partnership: Delivering Global Britain</i> at Chatham House
19	18-07-2018	Liam Fox	Secretary of State for International Trade	<i>At the crossroads: Britain and global trade</i> at Royal Society, London
20	17-08-2018	Mark Field	Minister of State for Asia & The Pacific	<i>Global Britain: supporting the Rules Based International System</i> in the Philippines
21	14-01-2019	Liam Fox	Secretary of State for International Trade	<i>Global Britain and the economy</i> in the House of Commons
22	11-02-2019	Gavin Williamson	Secretary of State for Defence	<i>Defence in Global Britain</i> at RUSI, London

**Table 2: Pre-Brexit speeches:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Speech and location</b>	
1	01-07-2010	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World</i> at The Locarno Room, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London
2	15-07-2010	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>Britain's prosperity in a networked world</i> in Tokyo, Japan
3	15-09-2010	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>Britain's values in a networked world</i> at Lincoln's Inn, London
4	15-11-2010	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
5	17-11-2010	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>International Security in a networked world</i> at Georgetown University, Washington D.C.
6	31-03-2011	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>"There will be no downgrading of human rights under this Government"</i> at the Launch of Human Rights and Democracy: the 2010 Foreign & Commonwealth Report, London
7	11-07-2011	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Commercial diplomacy "at the heart of Britain's foreign policy" at Inward Investment Business Summit, London
8	27-07-2011	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>The Commonwealth is "back at the heart of British Foreign Policy"</i> at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference, London
9	08-09-2011	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>"The best diplomatic service in the world: strengthening the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as an Institution"</i> at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London
10	09-07-2012	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>International law and justice in a networked world</i> in The Hague, The Netherlands
11	17-10-2012	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Foreign Secretary speech on diplomatic tradecraft at The British Academy, Carlton House Terrace, London
12	12-11-2012	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
13	24-01-2014	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos
14	11-11-2013	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
15	24-01-2014	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos
16	15-04-2014	William Hague	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>The future of British foreign policy</i> at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Mansion House, City of London
17	25-03-2015	Philip Hammond	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Foreign Secretary speech at the Lord Mayor's Easter Banquet at the Mansion House, City of London
18	08-07-2015	Michael Fallon	Secretary of State for Defence	Speech to ambassadors at the FCO leadership conference, London
19	15-10-2015	Justine Greening	Secretary of State for International Development	<i>UK aid - why it is the right thing and smart thing to do for Britain</i> at the "Britain's Role in a New Age of Development" event at Chatham House, London
20	16-11-2015	David Cameron	Prime Minister	PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, City of London
21	06-04-2016	Philip Hammond	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	<i>Foreign Secretary speech at the Lord Mayor's Easter Banquet at the Mansion House, City of London</i>
22	25-04-2016	Theresa May	Secretary of State for the Home Department	<i>Home Secretary's speech on the UK, EU and our place in the world</i> at the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, London



#### **4. Global Britain**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May (2017a) said the following on the future of the United Kingdom: “*we will take this opportunity to make Britain stronger, to make Britain fairer, and to build a more Global Britain too*”. These three guiding principles for the upcoming negotiations and the future in general largely correlate to three major identifiable policy themes and ambition of *Global Britain’s* ideology. To make Britain stronger is related to themes of *Sovereignty, Independence & Autonomy*. To make Britain fairer is related to subjects of *Democracy, Justice, Development & Rule of Law*. Lastly, build a more global Britain is akin to the topic of *Free Trade, Economics & Entrepreneurship*. In addition to these three themes, *Global Britain* offers a window into its conception British identity. Moreover, *Global Britain* also proves to be an exercise in role conception and finding a new place in the world. Matters like identity and role both influence and are influenced by the three themes mentioned above and serve as justifications for policy.

Fundamental to *Global Britain* is an inherent contradiction in its discourse. On the one hand, Britain is constructed as great and influential, whilst simultaneously on the other hand, Britain needs to be restored and needs to become great again. A constant tension exists between these two discourses: a discourse of Britain as standing-tall and a discourse of Britain in decay. The first is focussed on British (historical) accomplishments and is a function of the imagined British identity and national character. The latter is heavily built upon the imagined European prison which ‘shackled’ Britain (Field, 2018). It picks and chooses those which are more apt for feeling the speaker is trying to convey.

#### **4.1 Global Britain’s policy objectives**

##### **4.1.1 Sovereignty, Independence & Autonomy**

The first and most immediate subject of *Global Britain* is its constant re-iteration that the United Kingdom is become a “fully independent, sovereign country, a country that is no longer part of a political union with supranational institutions that can

override national parliaments and courts” (May, 2016b). Although, an obvious direct response to the new realities of Brexit, it does seem to speak to a larger anxiety of giving it up again. Prime Minister May (2016b) states she will not accept any form of ‘trade-off’ between giving up control in and freely trading with the European Union. EU market access is constantly being juxtaposed with issues such as sovereignty and autonomy. The ideas of freedom, independence and national sovereignty are seemingly being elevated to cult status and take primacy over other issues. Unsurprisingly, sovereignty is presented as the locus of *Global Britain*, enabling all its objectives and ambitions.

In *Global Britain*’s narrative, control, sovereignty, independence and autonomy are equated to an ability to shape a ‘better, more prosperous future’ (May, 2017b), and to better ‘confront the challenges of the future’ (Davis, 2016). Idioms pertaining to attaining sovereignty and freedom by leaving the EU like ‘seizing the opportunities’ are commonplace (Johnson 2017; Fox, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019; Lidington, 2018; May, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Mordaunt, 2018b; Williamson, 2019). The best and most exemplary expression of what the *Global Britain*-ideology entails is a quote from Penny Mordaunt (2018b), Secretary of State for International Development: “*Global Britain is about looking out into the world and seizing the opportunities that come from those freedoms we gain by leaving the EU*”.

Within the previous quote lies another frequently stressed consequence of this newfound freedom and sovereignty, namely the ability to entertain a global outlook – i.e., the ‘global’ in *Global Britain*. Expressions along the lines of ‘looking beyond our continent’ and going into ‘the wider world’ are part of almost all discussions of *Global Britain*. Sovereignty and independence are thus the key to unlocking and enabling this global outlook and approach. This globality is important in three distinct ways. First as a way to justify such an outlook by employing history. Second, it is a driver for its trading policy. Third, as an expression of British identity but the last two are discussed later.

The supposed attainment of sovereignty by leaving the EU is portrayed as a ‘restoration of parliamentary sovereignty and national self-determination’ (May, 2017b), as the UK ‘taking back control of its democratic institutions’ (Johnson, 2016b), as the UK as ‘a sovereign nation once again’ (May, 2017d) and taking back control over its ‘border, laws and money’ (Fox, 2019). The idiom of ‘taking back control’ is a significant

reoccurring phrase across the entire *Global Britain* narrative. It alludes towards a pre-EU/EEC time when Britain was supposedly sovereign, and Britain was still a global hegemon. Cueing the audience to connect that memory of hegemony to possession of sovereignty, and thus to *Global Britain's* future. Although Britain's imperial heydays are never explicitly mentioned, euphemistic references to its historic achievements and power are never far. For instance, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson (2019) ties the imaginary of imperial greatness and status to *Global Britain* vision of the future through the following statement: "...we should remind ourselves that we are a nation with a great inheritance. A nation that makes a difference. A nation that stands tall".

#### **4.1.2 Democracy, Justice, Development & Rule of Law**

A second reoccurring theme within the *Global Britain* discourse is the stressing of the importance of democracy, justice, development and rule of law both at home and abroad. Its contents are inextricably tied to issues of sovereignty. In the same vein as to how sovereignty was discussed, control over laws, rules and judges are presented as the ultimate prize of Brexit due to this newly achieved sovereignty and freedom. This is especially true in early speeches (mostly in 2016), whilst the later speeches (mostly from 2017 onward) formulated it more akin to a key, tool and basis for securing peace and trade globally, as a key part of British identity and history, but also as a guiding principle for foreign policy.

Though discussed later in greater detail, a great deal of national pride and identity is derived from its parliamentary democracy and its diversity, fair- and justness (May, 2017c). There exists a real sense that British parliamentary democracy suffered under EU membership and that Brexit and *Global Britain* is going to restore it. A vote for Brexit is framed as a vote for democracy above anything else (Johnson, 2016b). Similar to sovereignty, phrases like 'take back control' (or 'restore [...] our parliamentary democracy' are part and parcel in *Global Britain's* lexicon (Davis, 2016; Johnson, 2016a, 2016b; May, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Fox, 2019).

Abroad, however, the focus shifts to Rule of Law. *Global Britain* advocates for building, defending and expanding a rules-based international system. A rules based international system is seen as a vital instrument for Britain to achieve *Global Britain*

global ambitions by securing global trade, global security and having mechanism in place to deal with global crisis and challenges through dialogue and international law instead of force (Field, 2018). Moreover, it is seen as the underpinning of the current global order which has allowed Britain and the world at large to flourish both in terms of economy and security (Fox, 2018b; May, 2017d). It is being put forward as an almost utopia in which global poverty is on the decline and the worst of the brutalities of war have been prevented (Field, 2018). It is no surprise that the UK is fashioned as its staunchest supporter and playing up its role and contribution to it. However, Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox (2018b) doesn't hide the fact that there is a business advantage attached to supporting it.

The support for democracy and justice fits into a larger frame in which the United Kingdom paints itself as a champion of humanitarian aid and human rights, although it has its ulterior material motives. The most telling example of this is how Secretary of State for International Development Penny Mordaunt (2018b) introduces a strain of *Global Britain* of her own, dubbed *The Great Partnership*. It doubles down on the supposed greatness of Britain around the globe. She connects the origins of democracy, the abolitionist movements and universal suffrage to Britain and its history. Thereby inviting audiences to imagine the United Kingdom in general to be a global force for good, and by extension *Global Britain* too. *Global Britain* focusses on past achievements to accentuate British exceptionalism and how it is willing to partner with developing countries to improve living conditions. It insists on itself as a global linchpin when it comes to development aid and how it can expand on its global operations now that it has been 'freed' from 'certain shackles that came with EU membership' (Field, 2018).

According to Mordaunt (2018a), to be a 'Great Global Nation' – fusing the identity-aspect of the 'greatness' of Great Britain and the aspiring 'global' of *Global Britain* – 'three D's' must be met: diplomacy, development and defence. All three seemed to be designed to promote democracy and justice whilst simulating jobs and growth around the world in order to make Britain a nation the 'world wants to engage' with. Together, these three D's reflect the goals of *Global Britain* by winning influence, supporting British values and strengthening partnerships globally in terms of diplomacy

and trade. The promoting of democracy, justice and rule of law is thus both a case of charity as well as geo-political calculation.

Another way in which Britain plans to promote these values globally is, as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Boris Johnson (2016a) put it, through its ‘irresistible soft power’ perpetuated by ‘gentle kindly gunboats of British soft power’. Britain’s education system, universities in particular, are presented as world-class (May, 2017e) and having had a major influence on world leaders (Johnson, 2016b). This ‘vast and subtle and pervasive [...] British influence’ supposedly comes natural to the UK due to having invented and perfected the language spoken around the world (Johnson, 2016a). The forceful expansion of its language by its colonial past are blissfully omitted. Moreover, the British Empire was not lost through hard-fought independence wars but was ‘unbundled’ by the British (Johnson, 2016a). Combined, this lets *Global Britain* claim and appropriate the legacy of empire without owning up to its atrocities. Johnson (2016a) paints *Global Britain* as a ‘soft power superpower’ project, repeats implications of exceptionalism and asserts restoration of its lost imperial, global linchpin role is achievable through *Global Britain*’s agenda, thereby playing into this imperial imaginary plane.

#### **4.1.3 Free Trade, Economics & Entrepreneurship**

A third policy focus in *Global Britain* is free trade, economics and entrepreneurship. This theme is not an isolated one but is intrinsically linked to both sovereignty and democracy. Sovereignty enables the United Kingdom to seek out new trade deals and democracy and the rules based international system secures and anchors these links and relations. Where the attainment of sovereignty and the restoration of democracy are presented as the reason for Brexit, securing new trade deals is *Global Britain*’s key promise. The sentiment conveyed through *Global Britain* is that Britain has been held back by EU memberships in its pursuit of its global ties and trade with the wider world (May, 2017a), leaving it provided ‘the freedom to look beyond the continent of Europe’ (May, 2016b). The *Global Britain* which is meant to emerge after Brexit is all for ‘business, free markets and free trade anywhere around the globe’ (May, 2017b).

There is an acknowledgement that the effects of leaving the EU single market will be big but also a confident attitude that a ‘broad and comprehensive trade deal’ (Lidington, 2018) with the EU will be reached as it ‘is the economically rational thing’ to aim for (May, 2017a). Moreover, leaving the EU, has been described by David Davis (2016), Boris Johnson (2016b) and Liam Fox (2017, 2018c), as not meaning to pull ‘up the drawbridge’, as it would not be ‘in our national interests’ according to Davis (2016). There is a broad focus on doing what is ‘in our national interests’. Whilst it is pursuing an agenda of full sovereign independence and new global trade links built upon anti-EU sentiments and identity issues, it remains pragmatic in their approach to maintaining existing interests.

Prime Minister Theresa May (2016b) is angling for a ‘mature, cooperative relationship [with the EU] that close friends and allies enjoy’. This reflects a larger tendency of *Global Britain*, a tendency towards making vague appeals to ‘old friends, and new allies’ – or variations in the phrase (Fox, 2018a, 2018b; Lidington, 2018; May, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Mordaunt 2018a, 2018b). These also extend beyond just the future relationship with the EU, it signals an intent to return to a situation of trade links which have previously been abandoned or diluted over the years, accompanied with a desire to create new networks of trade and influence.

The promise of all these deals is not only economic prosperity but also to (re-) claim a central role in global networks of trade and asserting itself once more as a linchpin situated at the intersection of multiple circles of trade. Which is, according to Boris Johnson (2016b), also ‘in the interests of global order that [the United Kingdom] are at the centre of a network of relationships and alliances that span the world’. This almost explicitly calls back to Churchill’s conception of the world, and also cues implicit assumptions of British exceptionalism. The aim of *Global Britain* is clear, Britain is aiming to ‘re-establish ourselves as an independent member of the [World Trade Organization] and we will be the world’s leading proselytiser for free trade’ (Johnson, 2018) and to ‘ensure that Britain remains a leading economic power, but also our ability to influence the new trading landscape in a way that reflects UK values and interests’ (Fox, 2018a).

## **4.2 Global Britain's self-conception**

### **4.2.1 British self-identity**

Why those themes are put at the forefront of post-Brexit foreign policy is partly explained through national character and identity. Identity and cherished values are being used by *Global Britain's* authors as legitimizing instruments for its policy choices. They are also means of mobilizing support for its ambitions and vision for the future by presenting them as logical extensions of Britishness and by reinforcement of the natural greatness of Britain. There is however no single definitive definition of what constitutes to British identity and speaker's claims can thus run contrary to each other. On the whole, a somewhat clear picture of *Global Britain's* British self-identity nevertheless emerges.

The most important aspect of how British identity is portrayed is yet another contradiction. On the one hand, Britishness is distinctly European with Boris Johnson (2017) claiming that Britain is 'one of the great quintessential European nations'. On the other hand, however, it is deemed so distinct that the EU 'struggled to deal with the diversity' (May, 2017a). The question of difference is constantly juxtaposed to an imagery 'Europe', whilst also claiming the same history and cultural heritage which lay foundational to its own identity. This is best articulated by Theresa May (2017a): "We are a European country – and proud of our shared European heritage – but we are also a country that has always looked beyond Europe to the wider world". Britishness is constructed as distinct from the rest of the continent by way of two main differentiating factors, there is a spatial divide, an outlook divide, but also by consolidating selfhood through national self-admiration.

At its core, again, another contradiction: Britain is a small island nation but simultaneously a global behemoth. To maintain such a narrative distinction and reconcile its imperial and hegemonic past with the notion of its smallness, the meaning and role of Empire was carefully changed in its national history from being the reason for its power and might, and thus why it is small today, to an expression of British greatness embedded in its national character (Saunders, 2020, pp. 1161–1164). This is what Boris Johnson (2016a) was doing when he described how the UK 'unbundled the British Empire'. This small but great sentiment was captured well by the Secretary of

State for Exiting the European Union David Davis (2016): “We may be a small island [...] but we know that we are a great nation”. Such allusions and remarks play into an image of the greatness Britain has achieved despite its size and subconsciously affirm that it will again.

Davis’s (2016) remarks signal an important aspect of British identity, namely its distinctive island-features, both the physical separation from the continent but also different way of doing things. First, the physical split from the European mainland allows for a spatial division between the imagined entities of Britain and Europe. This physical spatial is narrative converted and stressed by idioms such as ‘pulling up the drawbridge’, which is employed by Davis (2016), Johnson (2016b) and Fox (2017, 2018c). Second, in terms of doing it their own way, being an island has led Britain to take on a very different outlook upon the world in contrast to Europe. Britain is, according to Prime Minister May (2017c), ‘by instinct a great, global trading nation [...] not just in Europe but beyond Europe too.’ A phrase often repeated by Prime Minister May (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) is that ‘Britain’s culture and history is profoundly internationalist’.

David Davis (2016) further degrades Europe by implying that the UK has outgrown and transcended the need for the EU. He describes it is a ‘guarantor for the rule of law, of democracy and freedom’ for Eastern European post-Soviet states, signalling the EU to be a project for the lesser fortunate. Johnson (2016a) takes this a step further by likening EU member state capitals to ‘the castles of Mitteleuropa’, implying EU to be a medieval, backward, continental German project which he implicitly contrasts to, what David Lidington (2018) describes as, ‘a modern, open, outward looking, tolerant’ British nation.

As per national values, Britishness means to cherish democracy and (social) justice, but these values also include tolerance, diversity, freedom, independence, equality and benevolence towards those in-need (Davis, 2016; May, 2017c; Mordaunt, 2018a, 2018b). Penny Mordaunt (2018a) states the follows: “Britain stands for free trade and cooperation, the rule of law, justice and human rights”. On a multitude of occasions, a willingness and worthiness to stand up for these values has been expressed (Lidington, 2018; Williamson, 2019). These expressions are filled with



sentiments of moral superiority of and ownership over those values (Johnson 2016a, 2016b; Lidington, 2018; Mordaunt, 2018a; Williamson, 2019). For instance, support for a rules based international system makes the UK supposedly 'unique' (Field, 2018), or in a different example it is claimed that 'the world is better for it' because of their values (Mordaunt, 2018a). This disregards the contributions of other nations to it and claims the heritage of those values.

#### **4.2.2 Britain's new role in the world**

As a culmination of its own envisioned identity, *Global Britain* is 'a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' to forge a new place and role for Britain in the world outside of the EU (Davis, 2016). Liam Fox (2018a) declared *Global Britain's* 'vision for a post-Brexit Britain [to be] one of leadership'. Brexit continues to be mostly formulated as a break and most importantly as a source of great opportunity: "it was a vote for Britain to stand tall, to believe in ourselves, to forge an ambitious and optimistic new role in the world" (May, 2016b). Led by its values and heritage, Britain is thus ought to be global leader and be confident in doing so.

*Global Britain* makes it clear that Britain must show engaged, global leadership and be confident and proud of that role (Johnson, 2017). Britain must occupy an internationalist position in which they 'meet [their] responsibilities', 'project [their] values, and 'act as one the strongest and most forceful advocates for business, free markets and free trade' (May, 2017b). This position in the world also comes with the need to 'commit [...] to the peace and prosperity of the world' (2016b), both in terms of providing aid as the 'development superpower' of the world (Mordaunt, 2018b), but also by safeguarding peace globally through increased hard power and global presence (Williamson, 2019). Prime Minister May (2017d) claims Britain will also 'provide a moral lead in the world', thereby reinforcing the moral superiority of British values.

A role of leadership is constructed as coming naturally to the UK because of Britain's national character. Penny Mordaunt (2018a) on why the UK stands up for its values and beliefs and does what it does globally: "Because we're leaders. We take responsibility. We feel motivated to act, to share what we have, to help." She later

doubled down by claiming “We are strong because we are leaders” (Mordaunt, 2018b). Moreover, British national history is employed to validate its claim to leadership. It is suggested that people ‘look for a lead from Britain, engagement from Britain’ (Johnson, 2016b). Taking this a step further, Johnson (2016a) claims the ‘world needs *Global Britain* more than ever’. Thereby, justifying the place and role in the world *Global Britain* is eying.

Implicit in this role conception, is the centrality the UK is ought to possess in the global order. It is ought to be present and involved to trade, negotiate, safeguard, aid and most importantly lead across all the corners of the world. British global leadership is conceptualized as the UK being the linchpin of a network of trade links, alliances, partnerships, and development aid links. A network comprised of ‘some of the world’s oldest and most resilient friendships and partnerships’, who together provide Britain with the ability to influence, lead, and guarantee prosperity and security (Fox, 2017). Comparable phrases like the discussed ‘old friends and new allies’-line make up the backbone with which *Global Britain* aims to perform its envisioned role, harking back to imaginaries in which the UK has occupied such central places before.

A series of three distinct frames is used to justify *Global Britain*’s ambitions for the role and place of the UK in the world. One of these discursive frames, is that Britain must ‘rediscover its role as a great, global, trading nation’ (May, 2017a). *Global Britain* is formulated as a post-Brexit policy framework with the goal the seize ‘the opportunity to lead [...] again’ (May, 2017b). It is suggested that membership of the European Union has merely interrupted Britain’s role in the world. This account of history fits with the identity narrative of Britishness greatness decoupled from empire as a source of power. *Global Britain* is therefore portrayed as the rightful return and an attempt to show that ‘once again, Britain can lead’ (May, 2016c).

Another frame used, is that Britain is ‘stepping up to a new, active role’ (May, 2017c). Britain is to become ‘outward-looking and more engaged with the world than ever before’, signalling to the audience that this is not a return but rather a first-time ascend to such a position (Johnson, 2016b). Moreover, although characterizing Britain as already in a position to lead, Prime Minister May (2016c) argues that Britain must adapt and ‘shape a new approach’. This frame elevates the importance of Brexit and

*Global Britain* in the narrative history of the UK as it paints them as the catalyst of its eminent climb in global standing.

Lastly, it is claimed that Britain has never left its globally centred position and will 'continue' to play its part. For instance, a sense British greatness is often perpetrated by playing up their role in European security and how Britain has and will continue to fulfil its 'role and responsibility to stand up for our values across the globe', even when that 'meant standing alone' (Williamson, 2019). Moreover, it is often said in that Brexit does not mean a 'retreat from our global role' but that it would be 'reinforcing that role' and to play 'our part as we always have' (Johnson, 2017). The UK is going to continue in its 'leading role in bringing the international community together' (May, 2017e).

## 5. Foreign policy in a networked world

Foreign policy under Prime Minister David Cameron was largely dominated by his Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs William Hague. Nonetheless, Cameron was still intimately involved, together they came up with a plan to modernise British foreign policy and vision for what they called a new ‘interconnected’ (Cameron, 2010) or ‘networked world’ (Hague, 2010a). This upcoming chapter shall follow a similar structure to that of *Global Britain*. First, this vision for foreign policy shall be examined whether same the three thematic policy priorities of *Global Britain* also feature in some way here and how these issues are talked about and framed. Second, the image of British identity and role conception which emerges in this pre-Brexit foreign policy discourse will be discussed and subsequently compared to that of *Global Britain*. Before all else however, an overview of what this vision entails shall be given.

At the start of Cameron’s first term during the Cameron-Clegg coalition government, after 13 years of Labour leadership, Hague set out the vision for this new government’s foreign policy in a series of four speeches (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d). The gist of these speeches is how Britain must adapt to a new ‘networked world’ after the previous Labour governments ‘had neglected to lift its eyes to the wider strategic needs of this country [...] in a world that is rapidly changing’ (Hague, 2010a). The world has become both more multilateral and more bilateral, increasing the importance of links and networks in order to exert influence (Hague, 2010a). According to Hague (2010a), it will encompass ‘a fundamental reappraisal of Britain’s place in the world and how we operate within it’. Contrary to *Global Britain*, this new vision for British foreign policy in a networked world is presented as more of an evolution than revolution. Or as Cameron (2010) put it: “*I’m not suggesting that we turn the country’s entire foreign policy on its head*”. Rather, it reiterates and doubles down on existing policy whilst adapting its methods and means to achieve it. Britain’s foreign policy approach must become itself networked by engaging globally and leveraging international links.

This new vision is summarized as the following: “*a distinctive British foreign policy that is active in Europe and across the world; that builds up British engagement in the parts of the globe where opportunities as well as threats increasingly lie; that is at*

*ease within a networked world and harnesses the full potential of our cultural links, and that promotes our national interest while recognising that this cannot be narrowly or selfishly defined”* (Hague, 2010a). Britain’s diplomatic network is constructed and portrayed as ‘the essential infrastructure of Britain’s influence in the world’ (Hague, 2012b). Cameron’s government focusses its efforts on four foreign policy areas: diplomacy, commerce, national security, and value promotion – all in the name of British national interests (Cameron, 2010).

## **5.1 Policy goals in a networked world**

### **5.1.1 Sovereignty, Independence & Autonomy**

A big omission relative to *Global Britain* is the subject of sovereignty, suggesting its focus was a Brexit phenomenon. This assumption is backed up by the fact that Theresa May (2016a), then Secretary of State for the Home Department, is the only speaker who referred to sovereignty in regard to the UK. Moreover, she does so in the explicit context of the impending Brexit referendum. May (2016a) describes how it is a vote over the question of: “*how we maximise Britain’s security, prosperity and influence in the world, and how we maximise our sovereignty: that is, the control we have over our own affairs in future*”. The question of sovereignty and its prominent place in foreign policy is thus a direct result of Brexit and shows the uneasiness about the sovereignty trade-offs of international institutional memberships and a general insecurity about its newly gained sovereignty in the post-Brexit discourse.

A counterargument is that the United Kingdom did previously care about issues of sovereignty but had no need of articulating it. Brexit, in this line of reasoning, merely brought it to the foreground. However, the way in which sovereignty, independence and autonomy were discussed in *Global Britain* is materially different. The uneasiness about potential trade-offs of sovereignty is nowhere to be seen in the pre-Brexit discourse. On the contrary, membership of various international organizations, including the EU, is in fact celebrated and portrayed as essential for Britain to continue fulfilling its role, maintaining its influence, and even ‘enhancing’ it (Hammond, 2016). This messaging on institutional membership remained consistent from the start of

Cameron's premiership towards the end. It started to alter only slightly from the end of 2015 onward when the new Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Philip Hammond (2016) started to justify EU membership more explicitly and Theresa May (2016a) weighted Britain's option in the aforementioned speech, less than two months out from the Brexit referendum.

Interestingly, where the ability for the UK to be 'seizing opportunities' was linked to regaining sovereignty and freedoms by leaving the EU, this version of British foreign policy is also preoccupied with 'seizing opportunities' without the sovereignty element (Cameron, 2010, 2014; Hague, 2010a, 2011d). Furthermore, even the promise that sovereignty, independence and autonomy will lead to the ability to shape a 'better more prosperous future' (May, 2017b) and the ability to 'confront the challenges of the future' (Davis, 2016) has been said before Brexit too without mentions of sovereignty. For example, when William Hague (2010d) outlined that Britain, following his vision, will be well equipped to 'face the security challenges' and 'in helping meet the major world challenges' of the future. Both Global Britain and Cameron's foreign policy thrive on promises of 'seizing opportunities' and on a similar believe in the ability of their vision to successfully confront the future.

### **5.1.2 Democracy, Justice, Development & Rule of Law**

Matters such as democracy, justice and the rule of law are seen as valued parts of British culture and identity and seen as vital to be advanced abroad. They are thought of as part of Britain's DNA (Hague, 2011a). Its history is cherished, and its global accomplishments celebrated. For instance, Cameron (2015) and Hammond (2015) both refer lovingly to a copy of the Magna Carta in the Guildhall and Hague (2014) appropriates the campaign to abolish the slave trade to the UK. But especially Theresa May (2016a) elevates democracy, justice and human rights to be the hallmarks of Britishness, in similar language used post-Brexit. Nevertheless, democracy, justice and other British values never take up the same heightened prominence as in the *Global Britain* discourse. This would suggest that this is either due to May's personal inclination or that it is tied to the Brexit.

Looking abroad however, ‘justice and international law are central to foreign policy’ (Hague, 2012a). Significant weight is attributed to the promotion of these values, as this was one of the four pillars of the Cameron-Hague foreign policy. The core values of liberal democracy; ‘the rule of law, the freedom of speech and freedom of the media, property rights and accountable institutions’ are all equated with long-term stability and even commercial success (Cameron, 2014). Hague (2012a) concurs: “*We have learnt from history that you cannot have lasting peace without justice, accountability and reconciliation.*” Making such an equation, it is not hard to see why Hague (2010c) sees value promotion as vital in pursuing British national security and prosperity. In a networked world, one’s own security is depended on the security of others; therefore, one must promote the conditions for stability, peace, security and prosperity abroad to achieve the same at home.

The geopolitical context of this period invites such rationale and language as dealing with extremist terrorist threats which originating abroad dominated foreign policy. Prime Minister David Cameron (2010, 2015) in particular was presents value promotion as a solution for stopping terrorism. Although he does not also shy away from using both British soft and hard power for advancing British values. Such a direct link with national security or portrayal as security tool is not, to the same extent, made in *Global Britain*. The only reference to increased global, instead of national, security is made in relation to the promotion of a rules based international system (Field, 2018). Which itself featured prominently in *Global Britain* but is barely mentioned here. Admittedly, ‘active’ and ‘bold’ support for it is both demanded and vowed for by both Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Fallon, 2015; Hague, 2012a).

Besides national security interests, the promotion of democracy and justice abroad is also seen as a moral obligation. British foreign policy is one with conscience (Hague, 2010a, 2010c, 2011a). One with the upmost respect for human rights and a believe that they ‘are universal and apply to all people, of every religion, ethnicity or culture, in all places and at all times’ (Hague 2011a). A similar believe in the universality and the principal superiority of democracy over oppression is expressed. Pursuing them is therefore simple matter of doing ‘the right thing’, which is in the long

run also in the ‘enlightened national interest’ (Hague, 2011a). The use of ‘enlightened’ and a belief in the universality of their own values, reveals a subtle understanding in British discourse of superiority over peoples and cultures who do not adhere to them. This superiority also serves as the driver behind feeling of a moral obligation to promote democracy, justice and the rule of law.

Justine Greening (2015), the Secretary of State for International Development, argues for support for the UK’s development policy in a similar vein. According to her, it is both the right to do but also the smart thing to do. It is clear that her priorities are indeed both benevolent and self-serving. For instance, ‘responding to crises and building resilience’ is done to help but also ‘based on the knowledge that instability ends up on our own doorsteps’. Another example is the reasoning for economic development as growth, on the one hand, enables countries ‘to lift themselves out of poverty and aid dependency’ but it also grows ‘the markets and trading partners for Britain of the future’ (Greening, 2015). William Hague (2010a) echoed a comparable sentiment back when he said that the support for the UN Millennium Development Goals was ‘a moral obligation and a contribution to our own-long term security’.

International development is deemed an important pillar of Cameron’s (2010) ‘strategic approach to defending our national security’ with the Department for International Development moving closer to the centre and ‘heart of government’ (Greening, 2015). Compared to *Global Britain*, is Cameron’s policy on the promotion of national values of democracy, justice, human rights, and rule of law more focused on the foreign than domestic context. Hence, it is less infused with nationalistic identity politics aimed at the domestic audiences but justified more as a self-serving move. Penny Mordaunt’s (2018a, 2018b) *Global Britain* development strategy is not a break in policy content but an expansion upon the groundwork laid here. Yet, her packaging and the rationale behind it have been adopted to fit *Global Britain*’s urgent need to justify its new role, one in which Britain is fashioned as a benevolent champion of, and linchpin in a network of development aid. These imaginaries are not found here as the calculations for development aid and value promotion are not based on identity and positioning Britain in the world, but rather are based more on economics and security. Although the generous nature of the British public is mentioned occasionally (Hague, 2010a).



### 5.1.3 Free Trade, Economics & Entrepreneurship

The third key theme in *Global Britain* was free trade, economics and entrepreneurship. Its presence here is a more muted. Partly due to the fact that the Department for International Trade did not yet exist, but also because its prominence was less urgent. *Global Britain* presented a re-imagination of UK trade relations as the big promise of Brexit and its overall vision, whereas this policy framework is content with adjusting within the confines of existing structures. The premise underpinning both policies does nevertheless roughly match. Both argue that the UK is not yet in decline but is ready to embrace new opportunities to ward off decline. Yet, *Global Britain* differs by adding a concurrent narrative of a dwindled UK, allowing it to play into both a narrative of strength and one of a revival. The goal of this vision, however, attempts to ward off decline by targeting three strategic objectives through promoting trade, economics and entrepreneurship: security, influence, and prosperity.

The logic of the first point is a hallmark for this ‘networked world’ approach and follows the same rationale as before: instability abroad poses risks at home. Trade, commerce and enterprise are provided as a twofold solution to security threats. The first and most obvious is that growing GDP will increase the amount of money which will flow into UK aid and development programmes, as it is fixed in percentages rather than fixed sums (Cameron, 2010). Economic instability abroad is deemed the root cause for the current threats to domestic security (Hammond, 2015). The second way is an emphasis on the symbiotic relation between trade and security. On the one hand, security and defence is required in order to sustain the ‘way of life’ of ‘international trade and travel, the safe flows of goods and people, open seas, [...] [and] a sustainable global economy’ (Hague, 2010d). Whilst on the other hand, security and defence capabilities exist at the mercy of the state revenues of trade, commerce and enterprise. David Cameron (2015) reiterates that a strong economy requires and is required for a strong military and overall national security.

A second strategic objective for promoting and increasing trade and business globally is the associated influence which comes with being a leader in commerce and with having trading links. In the words of Prime Minister Cameron (2013b): “A strong and successful economy is the foundation of our influence [...]”. Philip Hammond

(2016) later repeated this attitude by proclaiming the economy to be ‘the foundation of everything we do’. Moreover, ‘economic power and political influence are diffusing’, according to William Hague (2010d). Its political influence is thus built on the UK’s economic weight but also through the diplomatic opportunities attached to having such trade and commercial links. Commercial diplomacy is likewise brought to the centre of foreign policy to ‘ensure our influence in the world is not diminished, promoting both our security and our ability to project our values’ (Hague, 2011b).

The implication here is that foreign investment will inevitably lead to sway over recipient countries, but this is never fully explained or acknowledged. Neither is the fact that this works both ways. These implications are abundant in *Global Britain* but are more muffled in this foreign policy formulation. *Global Britain* makes more explicit calls back to an imaginary space in which the UK was a global commercial titan. Here, small references are made to history, but they never reach the same prominence. Rather, this ‘networked world’ frames its economic influence as the extension of its current ‘unrivalled concentration of capital and capabilities in London’ (Hague, 2011b).

The third goal that this commercial foreign policy is meant to achieve is perhaps the most simple; domestic economic recovery, growth and stability but also an opportunity to make Britain fairer at home (Hague, 2010d). This is a point which is shared by *Global Britain*, who also made this one of its three explicitly stated *raison d’être* (May, 2017a). Within this framework, the trade and investment opportunities are meant to bring about an economy for everyone, not just ‘new jobs in London or the South East – but right across the whole country’ (Cameron, 2013b). Similar sentiments surrounding foreign investment were also present a year prior when Cameron (2012) declared it ‘positively beneficial for British jobs [...] and for rebalancing our economy’. Moreover, new bilateral relationships ought to ‘secure Britain’s economic recovery’ (Hague, 2010b). Foreign policy is thus serving the economic interests of the British people by making deals to support national prosperity and to support British businesses (Hammond, 2015). Through such legitimization, remote issues such as foreign policy are made tangible and made appealing. Language like this is akin to that of *Global Britain*, which was in an almost permanent state of justifying itself to the public.

## 5.2 Pre-Brexit self-conception

### 5.2.1 British self-identity within the EU

Although with less detail than before, Britishness and British values are also constructed here. Britishness and British values are often portrayed as at odds or in a culture clash with extremist ideologies, something absent in *Global Britain*. Similar to how *Global Britain* frames its values, they are again presented in a multitude of occasions as being worth standing up for (Cameron, 2012, 2013b; Fallon, 2015; Hague, 2011a) These national values are ‘part of [British] national DNA’ and are the building blocks of what makes Britain British, but they are also translated and woven into its foreign policy (Hague, 2010c). An aura of moral superiority prevails over them. This superiority is evident in the ways they are connected to the abolishment of the slave trade, the defeat of fascism and communism but also the spread of human rights and democracy (Cameron, 2010). The UK is thought to enjoy global ‘moral authority’ because of them (Cameron, 2010; Hague, 2010a).

British values are surprisingly consistent in this vision for foreign policy. William Hague (2010c) defines them as follows: “*They include our belief in political freedom and economic liberalism, our commitment to helping the poor, to granting protection to refugees and to mitigating the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable. Our attachment to the qualities of tolerance, compassion, generosity, respect for others and the right of families and communities to choose how they live within the law, are also part of our values*”. This list serves as the basis and seemingly as a guideline for future speeches. Only from 2014 onwards is there some alterations in the wording, with Cameron (2014) stating the national values to be: rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of media, property rights and accountable institutions. This wording was later adopted by Michael Fallon (2015) who described them as follows: rule of law, freedom and tolerance. These values stayed largely the same post-Brexit but interestingly the issue of refugees and migrants was dropped in favour of problematizing it and presenting it as a reason for Brexit (May, 2017a).

On the whole, it keeps self-identification to a minimum by only engaging with what it believes its national values are. A reason for this is that there is no clear ‘other’ to contrast itself to. This inevitably leads to a weaker construction and sense of self. The only ‘other’ somewhat widely featured here are extremists terrorist. These are too dissimilar however for a need to extensively define the difference. There is no need for skilful nuance, to blow up subtle differences or to create discursive wedges between itself and the ‘other’. Although, the drawbridge analogy was however used twice by Cameron (2012b, 2014) here in a very similar manner to *Global Britain*. He argued against pulling up the drawbridge, playing into the island conception of the UK, and to ‘shut ourselves off from globalisation’ (2014) or to ‘ignore the interconnectedness of the world economy’ (Cameron, 2013). In sum, *Global Britain* needed to create a black and white difference out of greyish European-British heap, whilst pre-Brexit difference was already night-and-day to all – the tolerant versus the intolerant.

Additionally, identity is a less high-profile legitimization tool as it was in *Global Britain*. Alternatively, policy is substantiated more in the name of ‘national interests’. Whereas development aid in *Global Britain* was largely justified through appeals to national character, here it was far more often justified as a pragmatic policy in line with the national interests. Justine Greening (2015), for instance, explicitly argued that it was both the right and smart thing to do. By contrast, Penny Mordaunt (2018a, 2018b) focussed heightened her attention on how it was the right thing to do as an extension of British national generosity, with geopolitical benefits presented as an extra. This extends to the almost fetishization of international trade deals, the near constant praise of British entrepreneurialism, and the frequent references to the internationalist character of Britain. Indeed, some is also present here with descriptions of British culture as ‘entrepreneurial, buccaneering spirit, and that rewards people with the ambition to make things, sell things and create jobs for others’ (Cameron, 2013b). But even though it featured prominently in the post-Brexit discourse, the internationalist nature of Britain, is never mentioned here. Hence, its use here is less as the sole rationale for policy but more like an explanation for the chosen approach.

## **5.2.2 Britain’s place and role in world**

From the start it is clear that *Global Britain* operates in a very different context when it comes to role conception. David Davis (2016) and Theresa May (2016b), for example, state how *Global Britain* is about forging ‘a new place’ and ‘new role in the world’. Pre-Brexit however that is less of a concern, as its role and place is firmly inside the structures of the ‘European Union, NATO and the UN Security Council’ (Hague, 2012a). Nevertheless, in this pre-Brexit discourse there is a move to renew and solidify its role and place in the world to better meet the challenges of this new networked world (Hague, 2010a). Although, this must not be seen as ‘turning our backs on Europe’ however, but as a way to secure UK’s place within it (Cameron, 2013a). First and foremost, the UK is a ‘leading’ financial and business powerhouse which ‘plays a crucial role in fuelling the EU economy’, according to Cameron (2012). ‘Britain is a great trading force in the world’ (similar characterization is also found in post-Britain) because of its ‘financial, legal, accounting, communications and other professional expertise’ (Cameron, 2010). The goal for Britain’s role in the world is apparent: ‘making Britain the easiest place in the world to start a business as well as one of the strongest business environments of all major European economies’ (Hague, 2010b). Cameron and Hague are clearly trying to style the UK as an important player and dealmaker globally, whose involvement makes the (business) world go round – not all too dissimilar as *Global Britain*.

Secondly, the UK is conceptualized as fulfilling a role of global leadership. But in contrast to *Global Britain*, which strived towards it and legitimized it partly through appeals to national character and history, leadership here is taken as a fact. No bombastic promises of future global leadership are present. Leadership is to be retained, rather than be regained – as most of *Global Britain* aims to do. In their pursuit of this goal, grave importance is given to building up an active and engaged diplomatic service. It seemingly is on these foundations that *Global Britain* is building its ambitions. Investments are being made to increase the diplomatic capabilities to be a master ‘in the crafting and negotiating of international agreements’ (Hague, 2011d).

Regarding Britain’s place in the world, Hague and Cameron set off a shift away from Europe. The Commonwealth is put back into the centre of British foreign policy, which allows the UK to act as an important intermediate between them and the EU and

gives it another outlet and source of influence (Hague, 2011c). It disregards the imperial and colonial past of how this group was formed but does attach itself to the imperial memories and imaginaries of it. Britain implicitly pictures itself as the matriarch of the organisation and its members. Additionally, by praising their shared ‘principles of liberty, democracy and human rights’, it cleanses and sanitizes the negative connotations that come with such imaginaries (Hague, 2011c). Moreover, building more and ‘even stronger bilateral relationships’ are described as key to create the desired network effects in which the UK ought to operate, maximise and exert its influence and power (Hague, 2010b).

These three combined move Britain’s place in the world out of the EU and towards a more central space in a larger network of links. This desire is very much shared with the post-Brexit discourse of *Global Britain*. There is a straight line between the groundwork laid here and the role and place *Global Britain* has in mind for Britain. A similar globally centred position in which Britain is ought to fulfil a role as linchpin in diplomacy, business and general leadership. The main differences between *Global Britain* and this pre-Brexit conception of role and place are the abundant imaginaries and the grandiose language used in *Global Britain* to advocate for it.

## 6. Conclusion

This research sought to interpret *Global Britain* in relation to prior, pre-Brexit foreign policy discourse through critical discourse analysis. Did it constitute to the bold new vision for British foreign policy its proponents made it out to be? Or did it conform to a longer trend in British foreign policy discourse and was the assumed rupture of Brexit overblown? The results of this comparative discourse analysis indicate that *Global Britain* largely stays true to the trajectory set out by the pre-Brexit foreign policy discourse of David Cameron and William Hague. It keeps its focus on strengthening its network of links by engaging more with extra-EU countries, like developing nations or the Commonwealth. To this end, even the shift in attitude towards Europe and the EU was set in motion pre-Brexit.

Nevertheless, it makes some distinct new adjustments to it. Although its policy objectives remained largely unaltered, *Global Britain* iterates on pre-Brexit discourse in two ways. The first is that issues like sovereignty and autonomy were introduced to *Global Britain's* discourse as the cornerstone of its agenda in an attempt to cue audiences into justifying Brexit. Second, *Global Britain* flips the existing hierarchy of earlier policy objectives. The attainment of new trade deals is now the goal and promise of its framework. Sovereignty, independence and autonomy, in combination with democracy, justice, development and rule of law, are put in service and enable the creation and seizing of trading opportunities, thereby increasing and securing global business activities.

Conversely, the prior pre-Brexit foreign policy framework frames its focus on trade and enterprise as being in service of other policy objectives. Trade and commercial links are being raised as an instrument to increase national security, global influence and domestic prosperity, rather than a goal itself – like in *Global Britain*. And with existing trade networks being upended by Brexit, it makes sense for the government to direct its efforts to forging new trade links. *Global Britain's* elevated focus on securing trade deals over other aims in this light suggests Brexit was the impetus for this shift.

Fixating on global trade fits in the larger frame of British identity it tries to project. *Global Britain* adamantly tries to make a compelling case for a move to a globally

central place from which it exerts its influence for good and fulfils a leadership role. It justifies this by making appeals to a version of British identity which is centred around it being an entrepreneurial, benevolent, internationalist but most importantly ‘great, global, trading nation’ (May, 2017c). Through reproduction of discourses of British exceptionalism, moral superiority of its values and downplaying the effects of losing its empire, Britain is positioned as a natural fit for global leadership at the centre of a cultural, diplomatic, or trade link network. Moreover, Brexit seemingly prompted a renewed push to assert British identity by ‘othering’ Europe. By connecting these aspirations of global centrality and leadership to imaginaries of the British empire, it transmits its ideology of British greatness, and imprints and consolidate this national self and role onto its audiences.

This analysis has shown that *Global Britain’s* language is not uniquely a Brexit-phenomenon but is akin to pre-Brexit discourse. Back in 2010, Cameron and Hague set out on a course to adapt its foreign policy to a new networked world. Comparable language was used to describe British national identity and role. For instance, the Commonwealth was brought back closer to the conceptual centre plane for British influence. This was later used by *Global Britain* to substantiate its claims of Britain’s internationalist nature. Additionally, it uses similar language to describe Britain as a great trading force (Cameron, 2010). Thereby signifying consistency in the mental conception of the United Kingdom regardless of Brexit. Yet, prior to Brexit, identity was rarely put forward as a justification for its position in the world. Explicit claims to leadership either as a role or character trait also remain mostly absent. This signals that Brexit prompted the government to (re-)assert its role and it thus constitutes to a rupture in the discourse as it needed to cue its audiences on why it should occupy such a central role and place.

This research has expanded upon the existing literature by embedding it more directly into the lineage of British foreign policy. Furthermore, it has gone beyond Daddow (2019), Parnell (2022) and Zappettini’s (2019) interpretation of *Global Britain* by engaging more directly with the discourses and by expanding on the sources used. Moreover, it has placed itself into the debate on the nature and narrative of *Global Britain* by asserting that it follows the ‘Britain as international linchpin’ narrative. It does



so through invoking imperial imagery and imaginaries, to communicate and convince its audiences of its vision. It also confirmed their findings on the duality of *Global Britain* where it contrasts itself against Europe and wants to separate from it whilst simultaneously highlighting its similarities and portraying its framework as a mere recalibration as they still need Europe. This research accepts Saunders' (2020) argument that the relationship between Brexit, *Global Britain* and empire is too complex to be directly linked. Finally, it added to the literature on *Global Britain* by questioning the assumed vital role of Brexit for the genesis of *Global Britain* as it has shown that most of its ideas predate Brexit.

In sum, this research concludes that Brexit did indeed pose a meaningful change to the course of British foreign policy discourse in the form of *Global Britain*. However, significant similarities and continuities between it and pre-Brexit foreign policy discourse prevail. Therefore, *Global Britain* is to be seen as a continuation and adaptation of pre-Brexit discourse to fit the new realities of Brexit. Although Brexit is a critical point in British foreign policy and British history at large, it did not cause a radical revolution in British foreign policy discourse but rather caused an evolution of existing discourse. Potential future research could extend the timespan in consideration to advance our understanding of *Global Britain* by embedding it further into the lineage of British foreign policy and exploring the continued development of it.

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