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*The 36th in our series of expert comment and analysis, by the **Rt Hon the Lord Howell of Guildford**, Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2010-2012), Chairman of the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee (2016-2019) and GSF Advisory Board member. Below is his submission to the Government's Integrated Review of UK Security, Foreign Policy and Development Policy, as President of, and on behalf of, the Royal Commonwealth Society, as Chair of (and on behalf of) The Council of Commonwealth Societies, Member of the High Level Group on Commonwealth Governance. As always, the views expressed are those of the author and not of Global Strategy Forum unless otherwise stated.*

Submission to the Government's Integrated Review of UK Security, Foreign Policy and Development Policy

1. Commonwealth engagement, British global policy, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Council of Commonwealth Societies

Britain's membership of the fifty-four nation network of states which comprise the modern Commonwealth has a threefold relevance to the forthcoming Integrated Review of Britain's defences, security, foreign policy and development policy.

The Commonwealth today, with its very high degree of connectivity at all levels of activity and interchange, offers Britain an exceptional, highly advantageous and fast expanding range of opportunities for furthering its 'soft

power' and 'wise power' deployment, its commercial interests and its global security responsibilities at both governmental and non-governmental levels.

The diverse Commonwealth network organization offers a web of uniquely suitable connections through which Britain can foster and deepen democratic methods and meet with precision the very varied humanitarian needs and development goals of vulnerable states and communities. The voluntary and non-treaty-based nature of the Commonwealth must be seen as a particular asset and strength in the digital age.

Deep British engagement with Commonwealth nations is popular at a national level, not least because of the wholehearted commitment of the British monarchy (which continues at informal and practical levels at all times). At a moment



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when Britain's global position is being re-appraised, a reaffirmed Commonwealth commitment offers a much needed national purpose and a unifying sense of direction.

These considerations earn the modern Commonwealth network a central place in any assessment of Britain's role in the transformed world conditions that have now come about. The Royal Commonwealth Society's own programmes and range of activities, together with those of the numerous members of the Council of Commonwealth Societies, reflect and support this view of a radically changing international order, and gives those involved a close insight into all aspects of the evolving Commonwealth scene.¹

2. Markets, security and furthering British global interests in the modern era: the Commonwealth dimension.

The old picture of the Commonwealth as a fading, nostalgia-ridden institution has long since crumbled under the impact of new realities. The proof of that probably comes more eloquently from the emerging figures of trade, investment flows and economic performance than from any sentiments, eulogies or futurology.

Not allowing for any COVID-19 impact², GDP growth is currently expected to be 7.2 per cent over the next five years for the whole Commonwealth (higher still in the main

Asian economies), against a European zero, or actual shrinkage. Potential advantages of trade and business links between countries with a common working language, similar legal systems and many other familiarising ties were there long ago. But what has galvanised the pattern of transactions recently is the rise of instant and continuous communication, allowing an ease and intimacy across peoples and communities which no other international network can emulate.

The new 21st century areas of growth and dynamism, the new sources of influence, wealth and trade, and the new consumer markets, now lie outside the EU and outside the North Atlantic sphere (with the exception of Canada, now becoming a major energy power). Good access to these new markets and groupings is essential. The Commonwealth network is one of several potentially advantageous routes into the new growth markets and high technology zones of Asia (Pacific, South-East, Central and Near), and increasingly of Africa as well.

The African story is taking an entirely new turn. Seen until very recently as an unending parade of stagnation, corruption and poverty, the new Africa (with 19 Commonwealth member states) begins to move into the wealth creation phase, lifted partly by new resources and partly by the spread of better governance and new perceptions about the mainsprings of development.

¹ Appendix 1 lists a detailed range of across-the-board policy proposals for the development of Commonwealth engagement as a central part of Britain's foreign, trade and security strategies over the two decades ahead. This can be viewed on pages 7 and 8 of this document.

² The severe impact on growth in many Commonwealth countries is expected to last over two years at least, and the pace of any 'bounce' cannot yet be estimated. But it is possible that in the Asian Commonwealth, with current Chinese growth resuming fast, the five-year estimate may still be achieved.



Services are now the strongest growth area in international trade. They now make up more than a quarter of all trade receipts. McKinsey suggests that more than half the wealth generated by international trade comes from services and various forms of data transmission.³ All the trends point to much more expansion of trade in this form, especially with the growth of digital fabrication and some return to on-shoring of manufacturing.

The British Government is rightly aiming for a new global services trade framework because the services aspect of the European single market has yielded very slim pickings over the years. Trust is the key ingredient when it comes to trade in services, data and knowledge products. ***RCS programmes are designed to provide the trust and fellowship foundations between all Commonwealth countries on which trade relations are built.***

While world free trade is a powerful force for good (and, indeed, the key means nowadays of upholding a rules-based order), the essential ingredient is trust and its supporting pillars of common language, common values, standards and above all, respect for the rule of law, underpinned by close affinities and feelings of fair dealings, friendship and cultural and educational exchange - exactly what the Commonwealth system delivers.

The Commonwealth has emerged in the digital age in a way that is organic rather

than governmental. It is increasingly woven together not so much by governmental linkages and directives but by professions, civil society and interest networks of density and power, all needing the support of, but *outside*, the governmental structure and process.

Examples are the networks of scientists, schools and universities, creative industries, parliamentarians, doctors, financiers, farming reformers, veterinary experts, engineers, architects, environmentalists, games and athletics groups, women's groups of all kinds and all ages, energy and climate specialists, judges, lawyers, small business promoters, insurers, architects, sight-savers, journalists, ecologists - the list goes on. ***These are the skills and binding forces which generate trust and attract capital investment, from which trade follows.***

More immediately, in the recovery phase from COVID-19, very close cooperation between Commonwealth member states (which already exists in scientific and medical spheres) will play an increasingly important part, as the recent Commonwealth statement and pledge, signed by all 54 member states, attests.⁴

Networks allow the opening of links for the United Kingdom through the Commonwealth to the evolving trading groups in Southeast Asia, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership⁵, Mark Two ASEAN (the

³ McKinsey Global Institute, 'Globalization in Transition: the Future of Trade and Value Chains', January 2018.

⁴ Commonwealth statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic. 15.07.2020.



Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the emerging trading groups around the Indian Ocean, the entirely new networks and clusters forming in Central Asia, in Africa and in Latin America, the Pacific Alliance, and to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Despite present concerns about Chinese policy, China links are bound to expand with the (BRI) Belt Road Initiative and the tying up of Chinese, Central Asian and European markets as never before in history. All this has to move forward with the necessary infrastructure of finance, trade facilitation, insurance, agreements on standards, etc.

Finally, as defence and security come to depend increasingly on cyber systems, on drone and maritime technology and on detailed intelligence, a clear role emerges for closer security and defence cooperation between Commonwealth member states. (Within the Five Eyes framework such linkages are already extensive). A cyber security dialogue has already emerged between Britain and South Asian states and projects for both military, maritime and air defences have been mooted.

In sum, Britain's security, foreign policy interests and prosperity, as well as its immediate post Brexit and post COVID-19 strategy, are now closely bound with Commonwealth engagement at all levels. The strengthening of all three areas should be a strategic national priority.

3. Enhancing Britain's contribution to world development, stability and prosperity via Commonwealth engagement

In an age of small states, the Commonwealth offers a life raft of opportunity and influence, where smaller voices get a bigger hearing, and the problems of vulnerable smaller states receive genuine attention and consideration, notably in meeting the severe challenges of climate change, energy scarcity, food and water needs, and other escape routes from poverty.

It gives Britain yet another chance to recover its once strong reputation for helping the smaller and weaker states of the planet, to be a source of supportive partnership, free of any suggestion of dominance, exploitation or control.

At least potentially, the Commonwealth is thus emerging as the kind of forum in which richer and faster-growing countries and the poorer and smaller nations can speak on equal terms, in which people from different faiths can sit down and discuss their problems calmly (there are 500 million Muslims in the Commonwealth), and in which almost all members are seriously committed – or under steady pressure to be committed – to good governance and to contributing to global peace and stability, rather than pursuing vendettas against America and 'the West'.

The hub-and-spoke Commonwealth model of the past typically put Britain at the centre

⁵ Formerly called just the Trans-Pacific Partnership, until America walked out on it. Now consisting of Japan, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Peru and New Zealand. Recently, Shinzō Abe, the former Japanese Prime Minister, stated that the UK would be welcomed 'with open arms' to join. A strategic aim of British policy might be not just to join, but to bring the USA back in again



of a wheel with lines extending out to all our Commonwealth partners, now 54 in number (with more lining up to join or associate). This model is no longer relevant.

The modern network-and-cluster concept is quite different. Instead of links from a central 'hub' to the various points on the rim, there emerges an intricate and living network of linkages without any particular centre. In the case of the Commonwealth, this currently means not 53 connections but 1,326 individual connections – a very different story.

The Commonwealth's network characteristics make it especially suitable for focusing in the most practical ways on the specific environmental problems and fears of the many small island and coastal states who are part of the 'club' or 'family'. While climate issues are certainly being addressed (if not all that successfully) at global level, via the UN, etc., the vastly varied and detailed needs of different small communities tend to get lost in the generalities and preoccupations with the big offender nations. This makes the Commonwealth the preferable forum in which to shape responses to the precise needs of the long chain of small and vulnerable island states round the world and the coastal ocean states of Africa, who happen to be part of the network.

4. Re-defining and popularising Britain's global and Commonwealth role in a radically altered international order

The Commonwealth network is only one of the new trading and business complexes

that have emerged in the 21st century. But it is much the biggest, although with light institutions and not bound together by any treaties. Instead, solidarity and the cooperative impulse flow from the standard-setting Charter of Commonwealth Values to which all members must seek to adhere, and toward which Commonwealth membership exerts constant pressure, even though there are clear backsliders.

In redefining Britain's 21st century role we contend that the Commonwealth organization, seen from the British perspective not as a hub, or relic of empire, but as a network injected with vibrant new life by the communications revolution, can play a major part.

We argue that that this new depiction of Britain as still a nation of exceptionalism, and still with a highly distinct role in a changed world, can be successfully built up in ways which cement UK solidarity and have equal resonance in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as England.

Departure from the European Union, together with question marks over the US-UK special relationship, have left the British public with a sense of unease and bewilderment about Britain's new direction.

This has now to be replaced by new relations with continental Europe, and by a new relationship with the USA. But in addition, a stronger vision of Britain in a post-Western era is required to provide an appealing and rounded picture of British 'destiny' and a genuinely integrating framework for the



operation of all Britain's international policies. *While at government level, Commonwealth countries may differ and clash, beneath the media radar, the networking process continues – each new connection sparking fresh initiatives and activity, leading to further contacts with yet further networks beyond. Thus, on a 'friend of a friend' basis, entrée to the twenty-first century global system of networks and institutions truly opens up to us.*

5. General Observation about interlocking UK Commonwealth strategy and UK national strategic direction

Many Commonwealth countries may well be quizzical about the UK's new-found enthusiasm for working with them, given the sharp downgrading of UK Commonwealth interest in 1972. In now returning to the 'fold', our policies and approaches must reflect a suitably condign attitude and a clear recognition that this is not in any way a replay of the old relationships.

Not only has the Commonwealth of 1949 gone. The Commonwealth of the 20th century has also gone and been replaced by a network of countries which includes some of the world's fastest growing economies and middle-income consumer markets. We need

to clear our minds that we are re-engaging with Commonwealth countries not in some kind of post-colonial central role, but as key part of the UK's new economic and security strategy in a transformed world – and a key channel through which to exercise our full responsibilities in today's disturbed and uncertain world conditions.

Finally, the Government's Commonwealth Unit, while now re-located from the Cabinet Office back to the FCOD, must continue to have the full authority of the Prime Minister to operate in conjunction with all departments in Whitehall, and have full powers to initiate and administer the policies, programmes and projects outlined above in the national interest.

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(Submitted on 17th July 2020)*

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House of Lords Official Portrait



APPENDIX ONE: For Attachment To The RCS/CCS Submission To The Government's Integrated Review Of Defence, Security, Foreign Policy And Development

Early and Practical Steps for further UK engagement with the rest of the modern Commonwealth network, and for full use of the extended role of Chair, leading up to the 2021 CHOGM.

We see the need for a substantial number of new measures and initiatives, on both the domestic and international fronts. closer defence and military ties (including maritime and air-force cooperation). Closer security ties with India should be a priority.

1. Intra-Commonwealth travel obstacles should be reduced, with the UK taking a lead in relation to visas, notably for business travellers and for students. The current ASEAN business travel-card system should be replicated for all Commonwealth member states. Visa arrangements for India should at least as favourable as those now available to China.
2. We propose that the UK, whether as still chair-in-office or subsequently, should propose bringing forward a new Commonwealth Agenda on Trade and Investment for Inclusive Development. Components should focus on:
 - Reducing the costs and risks of intra-Commonwealth trade and investment.
 - Boosting services, knowledge product, data and all other digitally related trade, including through regulatory cooperation.
 - Special measures to tighten ties and cooperation between creative industries throughout Commonwealth countries. Measures to involve women, young entrepreneurs and SMEs more fully in the trade and commerce process.
 - Addressing sensitively the special and highly varied needs of the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states and islands.
 - Building on partnerships with non-governmental Commonwealth entities, with diaspora groups and with civil society in all forms.
 - Directing all Whitehall relevant Departments to encourage Commonwealth interaction and trade links.
3. Beyond the above an 19-point programme for British policy initiatives in relation to the modern Commonwealth network:
 - A working Group for Commonwealth Trade Facilitation.
 - An E-Commerce trans-Commonwealth Group.
 - Energetic promotion of ICT throughout both stronger and weaker Commonwealth states, using low earth orbiting satellites, UHF radio and other technologies to provide universal cellular services.
 - An expansion of training and capacity-building programmes, which the UK is strongly placed to offer.
 - Encouragement of cooperation between creative industries and artistic sectors throughout the Commonwealth network.
 - Sharing of best regulatory practices (learning from ASEAN, APEC, TPP, UNCTAD and ITC).
 - Commonwealth Trade Ministers to meet annually, to provide oversight, review progress and promote new initiatives.
 - Commonwealth Education and Science Ministers should be presented by the Chair with a new range of school, university and literacy initiatives, with extended support for the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the Distance Learning Programmes of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL).
 - At home, schools throughout the UK should be provided with a greater volume of high quality Commonwealth information, emphasising both the benefits to the UK and the beneficial UK role and purpose inherent in the modern Commonwealth structure (which still contains 14 of the world's poorest countries, but now also some of the fastest-growing and richest).
 - The UK should initiate strengthened security cooperation across the Commonwealth, and through ICT promotion, not merely through cyber technology links, as identified in the CHOGM communiqué, but also through direct intelligence and through operational co-operation (viz. in maritime joint operations in the Indian Ocean theatre). Deployment of the new UK aircraft carrier to the Pacific region should be combined with close Commonwealth consultation and partnership.
 - Bearing in mind the centrality of UK-Indian relations in the modern context (as noted above) we are unimpressed by the Home Office handling of the relationship in the case of student visas. The entire issue of student admissions to the UK is clearly in need of overhaul and separation from other aspects of immigration policy. It is nothing less than deplorable that Commonwealth student numbers are climbing in American and German universities while flat or falling here. The Indian drop in numbers is especially regrettable.



- UK support for the Caribbean economies should be the hallmark of Commonwealth solidarity and UK generosity. At present it is neither. As noted, the disaster preparation commitment at CHOGM is welcome but major upgrading of Caribbean policy, embracing trade, tourism, security, as well as strengthening climate change resilience and disaster relief operations is called for. We call attention to the strong and growing Chinese involvement in several of the Caribbean countries. In some limited cases this may offer opportunities for direct cooperation with Chinese projects.
- The UK should encourage Reform of Commonwealth Governance to meet new world conditions in the digital age, together with reform of the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat, with much greater emphasis on outsourcing functions and embracing the private sector, social entrepreneurship and civil society organisations.
- Although the FCO and DFID are now to be merged in a very large Department, the Government should take a further step and restore the former Commonwealth Department and the post of Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, to oversee implementation of the programmes and initiatives above and to keep the public informed and refreshed about Britain's role and purposes in the modern and evolving Commonwealth network.
- Pending this, while the highly successful Cabinet Office Commonwealth Unit has now been moved back to a FCO location, it is vital that the unit should operate on a pan-HMG basis, with permanent representation and input from all related Whitehall departments. Merging the expertises (and budgets) for Commonwealth engagement in the two Department should give the opportunity for new strength and impetus to British Commonwealth policy.
- A standing body to examine new member admissions and re-admissions, associate and observer status and how other Commonwealth connections with modern world networks should be established. This would have on its agenda Zimbabwe and other African applicants. It would also propose steps to re-invigorate links with South Africa, as it enters a new and more Commonwealth-friendly phase and seeks to revive SADC cohesion. A separate body should oversee the matter of Chinese involvement and investment – an issue permeating almost all Commonwealth countries and raising important geopolitical questions.
- The recent and evident interest of the Republic of Ireland in closer association with the Commonwealth should also be registered, and could play a part in resolving current difficulties and in promoting common purposes throughout the British Isles.
- In the context of the proposed merger all DFID and ODA-able UK development programmes should be reviewed to halt and reverse the present diminishing proportion going to Commonwealth countries. The DFID website asserts the Department's commitment to Commonwealth links. Specific programmes matching deeds to intentions should be registered and incorporated in the Government's overall Commonwealth strategy.
- Involvement in a Mark Two Trans-Pacific Partnership (the USA having walked out) should be linked strongly to our Commonwealth connections in the region. Just as it used to be claimed (not always convincingly) that EU membership gave the UK extra clout on global issues, so now, in an even more convincing sense, the clout from our membership of the new Commonwealth network should become a highly positive factor in our global positioning and policies.

