



U.K. Wants to Restore British Empire — But Bumps into Reality

Does Britain foresee a day in which, once more, the sun will cease to set on its empire?

Despite the bitter realities presented by today's highly competitive geopolitical landscape, the United Kingdom has refused to completely abandon visions of a day in which it is once more a great power with far-reaching military and economic influence.

But the country has done little to move in that direction.

Two years ago, the U.K. government [published](#) a comprehensive policy paper titled the “Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.”



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The paper sought to establish a standard for British foreign policy for the next several decades. It envisioned the U.K. establishing a major presence in the Pacific, growing its stockpile of nuclear weapons, and even setting up a network of overseas military bases.

But in the absence of any real progress toward these goals, London has now seemingly scaled down its ambitions with a [“refresh”](#) of the plan, which ostensibly is based on “a more contested and volatile world.”

To contrast the two documents, the original Integrated Review “identified four trends that would shape the international environment to 2030: shifts in the distribution of global power; inter-state, ‘systemic’ competition over the nature of the international order; rapid technological change; and worsening transnational challenges.”

But the “refresh” takes into account both “the pace at which these trends have accelerated over the past two years” and the fact that “the transition into a multipolar, fragmented and contested world has happened more quickly and definitively than anticipated.” Per the new document, these shifts call for a new set of “priorities and core tasks to reflect the resulting changes in the global context.”

One of the major and sudden shifts that British foreign policymakers are now finding themselves having to account for is the rate at which U.S. hegemony has fallen from its once-unchallenged status — a result of partnerships among powers such as China, Russia, and Iran.

“China’s deepening partnership with Russia and Russia’s growing cooperation with Iran in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine are two developments of particular concern.... Tensions in the Indo-Pacific are increasing and conflict there could have global consequences greater than the conflict in Ukraine,” the report reads.

What solutions does the paper offer for combating the non-Western regimes that are “working together to undermine the international system or remake it in their image”?



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 21, 2023

One notable aspect of the new integrated report is an acknowledgement that the U.K. “must navigate with an understanding that not everyone’s values or interests consistently align with our own.”

In other words, to remain competitive, London will have to work with regimes whose values don’t neatly fit into the box of liberal democracy.

As the paper reads:

Today’s international system cannot simply be reduced to “democracy versus autocracy”, or divided into binary, Cold War-style blocs.... An expanding group of “middle-ground powers” ... do not want to be drawn into zero-sum competition any more than the UK does. We will need to work with these countries to protect our shared higher interest in an open and stable international order, accepting that we may not share all of the same values and national interest.

What this reveals is an acceptance that Beijing’s model of realpolitik has yielded greater fruit than the West’s lofty “democratization” efforts. The willingness of China and Russia to work with regimes vastly different from their own in order to achieve mutually beneficial results (among those results: the weakening of U.S. hegemony) has allowed their new global order to grow rapidly.

However, the authors of the report do not seem to extend that acceptance of divergent values to Russia. On the contrary, the paper declares it a priority to “contain and challenge Russia’s ability and intent to disrupt the security of the UK, the Euro-Atlantic and the wider international order.”

In fact, the report boasts of having “weakened the Russian war machine with hundreds of targeted sanctions, coordinated with our allies” and of having sent billions of pounds in aid to Ukraine.

To their credit, the report’s authors admit that London’s attempt to fight a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine is having a negative impact on the lives of Britons, writing:

[The conflict] has contributed to a huge rise in energy prices and serious burdens on families, leading to unprecedented government intervention. More widely, geopolitical instability is manifesting itself in interrupted supply chains and rising prices for basic goods. Consequently, the UK’s ability to shape the global environment — and to identify, address and confront threats — is of growing importance to domestic policy, and to our national wellbeing.

Far from dissuading them to rethink the Ukraine situation, however, the U.K. foreign-policy establishment appears eager to double down, as the paper calls for a continuation of sanctions on Russia and the sending of weapons to Ukraine.

In one sense, the U.K.’s desire to go back to the glory days of the empire is understandable. The longing for relevance and greatness is akin to Americans’ hope of making America Great Again.

However, the answer for Britain, as it is with America, is not to focus on globalist empire building, but, on the contrary, to reject globalism and everything that comes with it — mass migration, indebtedness to central banks and foreign creditors, and endless wars.

When Britain’s government truly puts Britons first, then will their country be great again.



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