



The Chatham House–YouGov Survey 2011

British Attitudes Towards the UK's International Priorities

Survey Analysis

Robin Niblett

July 2011

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CHATHAM HOUSE

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

Charity Registration No. 208223

ISBN 978 1 86203 252 1

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Designed and typeset by Soapbox, www.soapbox.co.uk

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Sarum Colourview Ltd.

The material selected for the printing of this report is Elemental Chlorine Free and has been sourced from well managed forests. It has been manufactured by an ISO 14001 certified mill under EMAS.

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Foreword

This is the second survey of British attitudes towards the UK's international priorities that Chatham House has developed in partnership with YouGov. The first survey took place in the immediate aftermath of the UK general election (24 June–2 July 2010). This one was conducted twelve months later, from 17 to 23 June 2011. The survey tests British thinking about the country's place in the world and assesses how this thinking may have changed during the coalition government's first year in office.

Once again, Chatham House asked YouGov to measure not only the attitudes of the British general public, drawing on a survey sample of 2,023 individuals, but also those of a group of 834 'opinion-formers' from YouGovStone.¹ The intention was to highlight any differences of opinion between these two groups, each of which can bring a different sort of pressure to bear on the government's international policy choices, especially at a time of severe budget cuts.

While a number of the questions were identical to those of a year ago, allowing for some comparison between the two sets of results, the 2011 survey contains a number of new questions that seek to probe public and opinion-former attitudes to the government's international objectives. The survey also takes into account unexpected developments during the course of the year, including the uprisings across the Arab world.

The following analysis of the results is not comprehensive, but offers a synopsis of some of the main points from the survey, considering their implications for the government's intention to implement a 'distinctive' foreign policy. It also benefits from a series of reactions by Chatham House experts and three informed commentators – Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former UK Permanent Representative to the UN and a member of the Chatham House Council; Lord Malloch-Brown, former Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and previously UN Deputy Secretary-General; and Peter Kellner, President of YouGov.

Our hope is that readers will look through the results and form their own conclusions. YouGov has provided a breakdown of the results from the general public by stated voting intention, gender, age, 'social grade' and region, while the YouGovStone results are broken down by party affiliation and then by sector. The full survey results can be downloaded from the Chatham House website (www.chathamhouse.org.uk/uksurveyresults). To facilitate this interaction, Chatham House has created a dedicated website (www.chathamhousesurvey.org) which allows the results to be filtered by sample (general public and opinion-formers) and category (voting intention, age etc.).

I would like to acknowledge the hard work that Jonathan Knight and Michael Harvey have put into the development of the survey, the assessment of the results and the design of the website. I thank Melanie Archer and Mariam Iqbal for their assistance with the preparation of the website. I also thank all of the contributors from Chatham House for providing their analyses of the results for this publication. Finally, I am very grateful, as always, for the editorial support provided by Margaret May and Nicolas Bouchet in our Publications team.

Robin Niblett
Director, Chatham House
July 2011

¹ For a full definition of YouGovStone, see the Appendix, page 36. YouGovStone panellists are opinion-formers drawn from a wide range of sectors including government, business and the media.

Executive Summary

Putting a 'distinctive' foreign policy into action

Since entering office, the coalition government has attempted to shape a 'distinctive' British foreign policy. One year after the election, this survey tested impressions of the coalition's foreign policy among the general public and opinion-formers.

A sizeable majority – 69% – of opinion-formers, who would be expected to pay the greatest attention to UK foreign policy, felt that it had stayed on much the same path. Only 20% (and 26% of the general public) believed that the new government had changed direction.

Of those thinking that British foreign policy had changed, there was a striking divergence between the views of the opinion-formers and the public. Among the public, 65% thought it had changed for the worse and only 17% thought 'for the better'. By contrast, 47% of opinion-formers considered it a change for the better, as opposed to 39% seeing it as having changed for the worse.

More worryingly, only 6% of the general public believed the coalition's foreign policy had enhanced the country's reputation, while 40% believed it had been damaged. At this early stage in the government's term, it is possible that concern over its foreign policy is principally a by-product of concern over the country's economic prospects or of the Libya intervention. It is important, therefore, to delve more deeply into specific aspects of the public's attitudes.

The ambition to craft a distinctive foreign policy has centred around four priorities:

- Advancing the UK's economic interests through bilateral commercial diplomacy with key emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey.
- Redefining the UK's relations with the European Union and the United States.
- A more integrated approach to security, defence and development.
- Extending the UK's influence through its values, culture, and diplomatic network, as well as its leading position in major international institutions.

What do the survey data tell us about British attitudes to these four priorities?

Commercial diplomacy and advancing the UK's economic interests

Promoting British business and trade was ranked highly by both the public and opinion-formers – only 'protecting the UK at its borders including counter-terrorism' and 'securing the supply of vital resources' were rated higher. That said, the general public showed little appetite for strengthening Britain's relations with key emerging economies (for example, only 18% thought Britain should have stronger relations with Brazil and 19% with India). But there was one notable exception – China. Despite its comparatively high 'unfavourability' rating, 34% of the public favoured stronger relations; only 10% said relations should be weaker.

Redefining UK relations with the European Union and the United States

Predictably, public attitudes towards the EU remain negative. It was placed last in a list of nine institutions in terms of a positive/negative rating, and a majority of both the public (64%) and opinion-formers (56%) believed the UK spent too much on its EU contributions. However, both groups believed – by a wide margin – that the UK should work closely with the EU on a wide range of policy priorities. Even on the contested issue of defence and security policy, the result for the general public was 63% 'total closely' versus 26% 'total not closely'. All respondents, including prospective Conservative voters, supported a close working relationship with the EU, especially on counter-terrorism and illegal migration.

The desire for the UK to work closely with the US on specific policies was widespread in every category, the top three areas being counter-terrorism, defence and security policy, and international trade. But results in favour of cooperation with the US were generally 5–10% lower than working with the EU; overall, they appear to coincide with the coalition's attempt to redefine the UK–US relationship as 'essential'.

A more integrated approach to security, defence and development

For the public, international terrorism is the overriding threat (53%). A strong majority (62%) believed that protecting the UK at its borders (including counter-terrorism) should be the main focus of British foreign policy. The risks from other security threats and policy priorities, such as preventing WMD proliferation, tackling international crises or dealing with weak and broken states, did not register as highly with either group. The government's conception of security, linking spending on development with a direct enhancement of the security of British citizens, has yet to resonate with the public. While opinion-formers believe that development assistance is a crucial part of the UK's international policy, 57% of the public believe that such assistance should be reduced.

Building on the UK's strengths and extending its influence in a 'networked world'

Respondents in both groups are optimistic regarding the UK's international strengths, ranking 'English as a global language of business and diplomacy' as the most important factor behind its international reputation.²

The opinion-formers also ranked the BBC World Service as the top asset in serving the UK's national interests. However, the public rated the armed forces as Britain's most important international asset, while also seeming to be more hard-nosed with regard to ethics and foreign policy. Only 39% believed that ethical considerations should be a factor in making foreign policy, as opposed to 68% of the opinion-formers. This divergence was not as apparent, however, when it came to the Arab Spring and military intervention. Only 21% of the public and 36% of the opinion-formers believed that Britain had a moral responsibility to support the uprisings regardless of whether they benefited its national interests; while 47% of the public and 31% of the opinion-formers said Britain should not involve itself in uprisings of this sort.

Conclusions

Undertaking structural shifts in foreign policy at a time of deepening economic austerity, however, requires paying greater attention than usual to public attitudes. This survey shows that government and public perceptions of the external risks and opportunities facing the country do not always tally. But it also reveals public perceptions on which the government may be able to draw in order to construct a more coherent foreign policy. The key will be to set to one side the contradictions and focus instead on drawing more explicit linkages between areas where public opinion can reinforce the government's foreign policy.

For example, the high levels of public support for working closely with the EU on external challenges should be used to promote a more credible UK commercial diplomacy. Coordinated action at the EU level will be important to negotiate the lifting of restrictions for British businesses in markets in China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies.

The government might also have more success in building support for increases in development spending if it could show that this spending can help lessen the pressures on migration into the UK and Europe, the risk of interruptions to imports of vital resources and the spread of organized crime, all of which were ranked among the public's most pressing threats.

Lastly, although UK public opinion showed relatively low 'favourability' ratings towards the emerging economies that will play an increasingly important role in the UK's future prosperity and security, the public appears willing to support stronger diplomatic ties with those at the vanguard, such as China, India and Russia. This suggests that Britons are adjusting their attitudes in ways that may support the government's efforts to pursue its 'distinctive' foreign policy.

² These figures are based on the respondents selecting up to three items.

1 A 'distinctive' British foreign policy?

Comparing the 2010 and 2011 surveys and taking into account the insights of the various contributors, it is possible to discern a particular mood among both the British public and opinion-formers about the country's international priorities. This mood diverges subtly but importantly from Foreign Secretary William Hague's oft-stated rejection of the idea of 'strategic shrinkage' and his ambition to strengthen British influence in a 'networked world'.³ It is a mood that combines a hankering after Britain's continued status as a great power with a sense of 'contented passivity' (as Jeremy Greenstock describes it below), with regard to British involvement in global problems and opportunities. The implications of this apparent disconnect between the government's policy stance and public opinion are discussed in the conclusion.

The 2011 survey tests the coalition government's stated intention to implement a 'distinctive' British foreign policy over the past year against British attitudes towards the UK's international priorities.⁴ It presents a range of questions, some general and some relating to specific areas of policy.

Before reviewing the results, it is worth briefly outlining the basis on which the government's claim to distinctiveness rests. Broadly, this can be summarized under four main themes:

- The government has placed commercial diplomacy at the top of its international agenda in an attempt to help drive future UK economic growth. It is using the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to promote trade and investment opportunities for UK businesses and is focusing its efforts in particular on the key emerging economies, including China, India, Brazil and Turkey.
- The government has sought to redefine its relations within the European Union (EU) and with the United States – traditionally, the anchors of UK external relations – lessening the Euro-Atlantic focus of British foreign policy of the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War periods.
- The government is trying to implement a more integrated approach to UK security – epitomized in the creation of a National Security Council (NSC), whose remit extends from defence and diplomacy to domestic security and international development.
- The government is attempting to use the UK's strengths in a networked world (language, culture, international business and diplomatic connectivity), in order to help advance human rights, democracy and accountability and to reform international institutions.

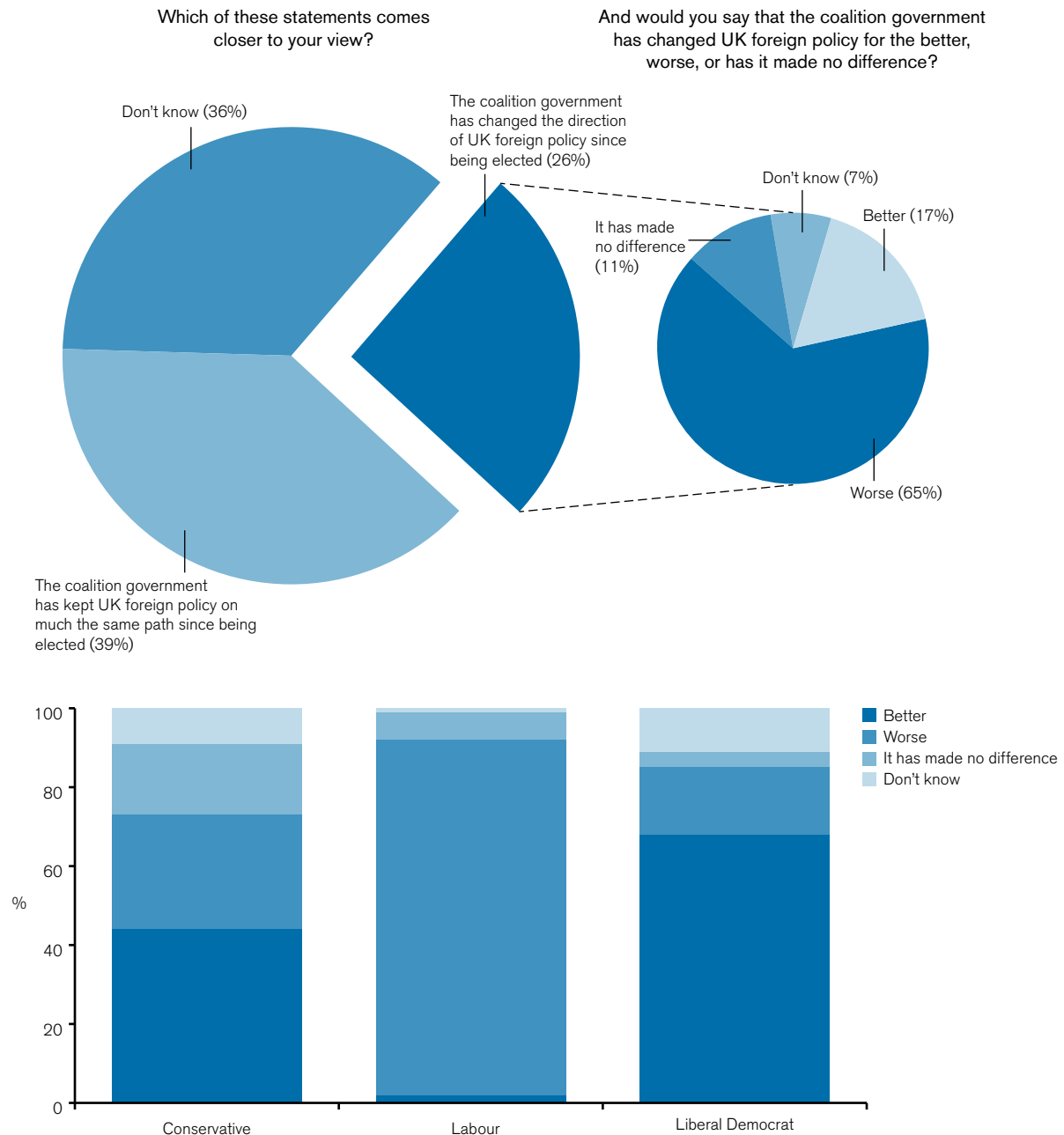
How then have the general public and opinion-formers in the UK reacted to the launch of this 'distinctive' foreign policy?

- A sizeable majority – 69% – of opinion-formers, who would be expected to pay the greatest attention to this issue, felt that the direction of UK foreign policy had stayed on much the same path since the new government took office.
- Only 20% of opinion-formers and 26% of the general public believed that the new government had changed the direction of UK foreign policy (39% of the general public thought it had stayed on much the same path, while 36% did not know one way or the other).

3 William Hague, 'Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World', speech in the Locarno Room, FCO, London, 1 July 2010, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=22472881>.

4 Ibid.

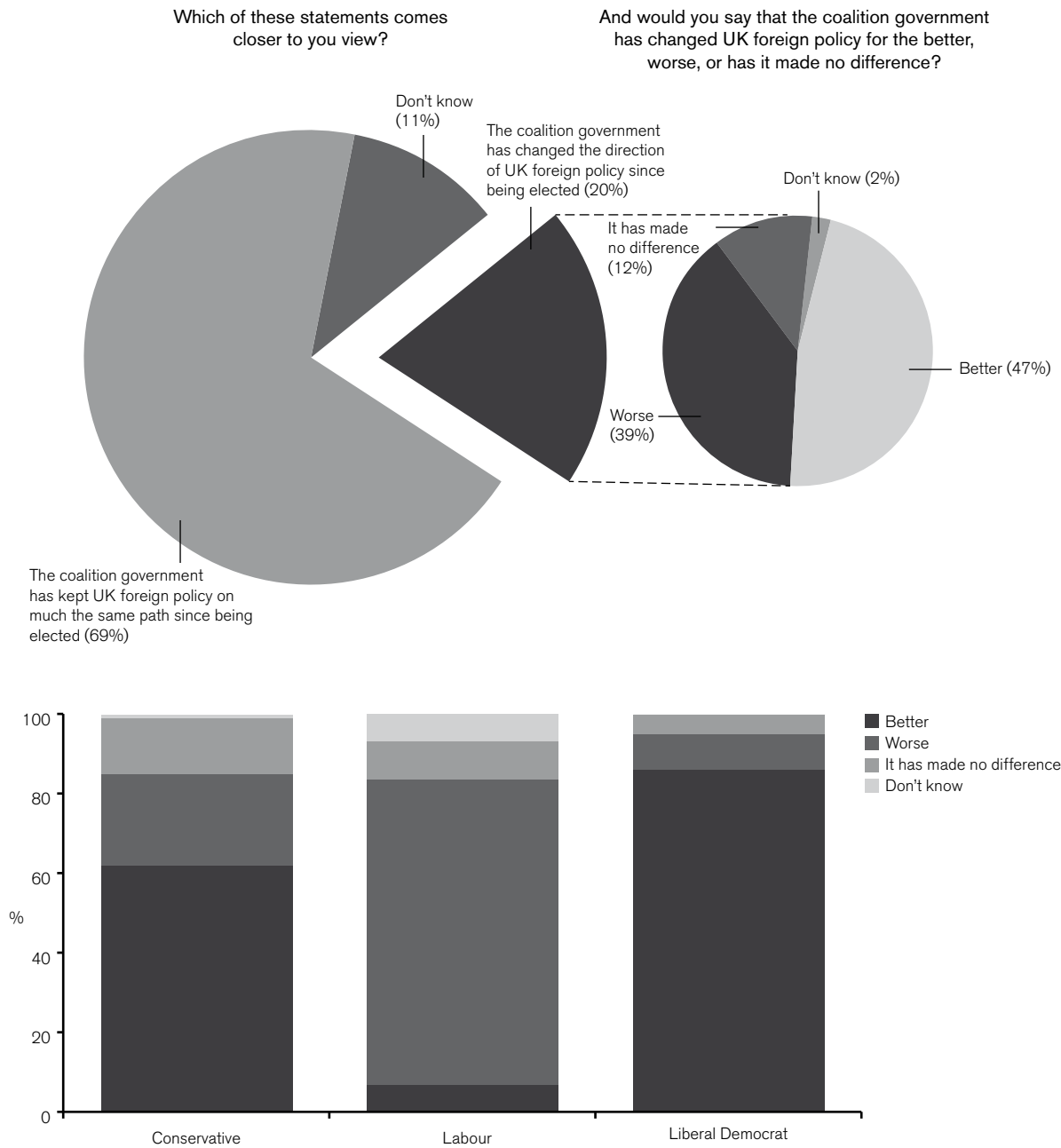
Figure 1a: The general public's view on the impact of the coalition government on UK foreign policy



Source: General public sample

- Of those thinking that British foreign policy *had* changed, there was a striking divergence between the views of the opinion-formers and the public over whether this had been for better or worse (see Figure 1a). Overall, 65% of the public thought it had been a change for the worse and only 17% for the better. By contrast, 47% of opinion-formers considered it a change for the better, as opposed to 39% seeing it as worse (see Figure 1b). However, the public judgment reflects a near unanimous view (90%) among Labour supporters that it was 'worse', while Conservative supporters were more divided in their assessment. The favourable Liberal Democrat views were not sufficient to tilt the overall result.

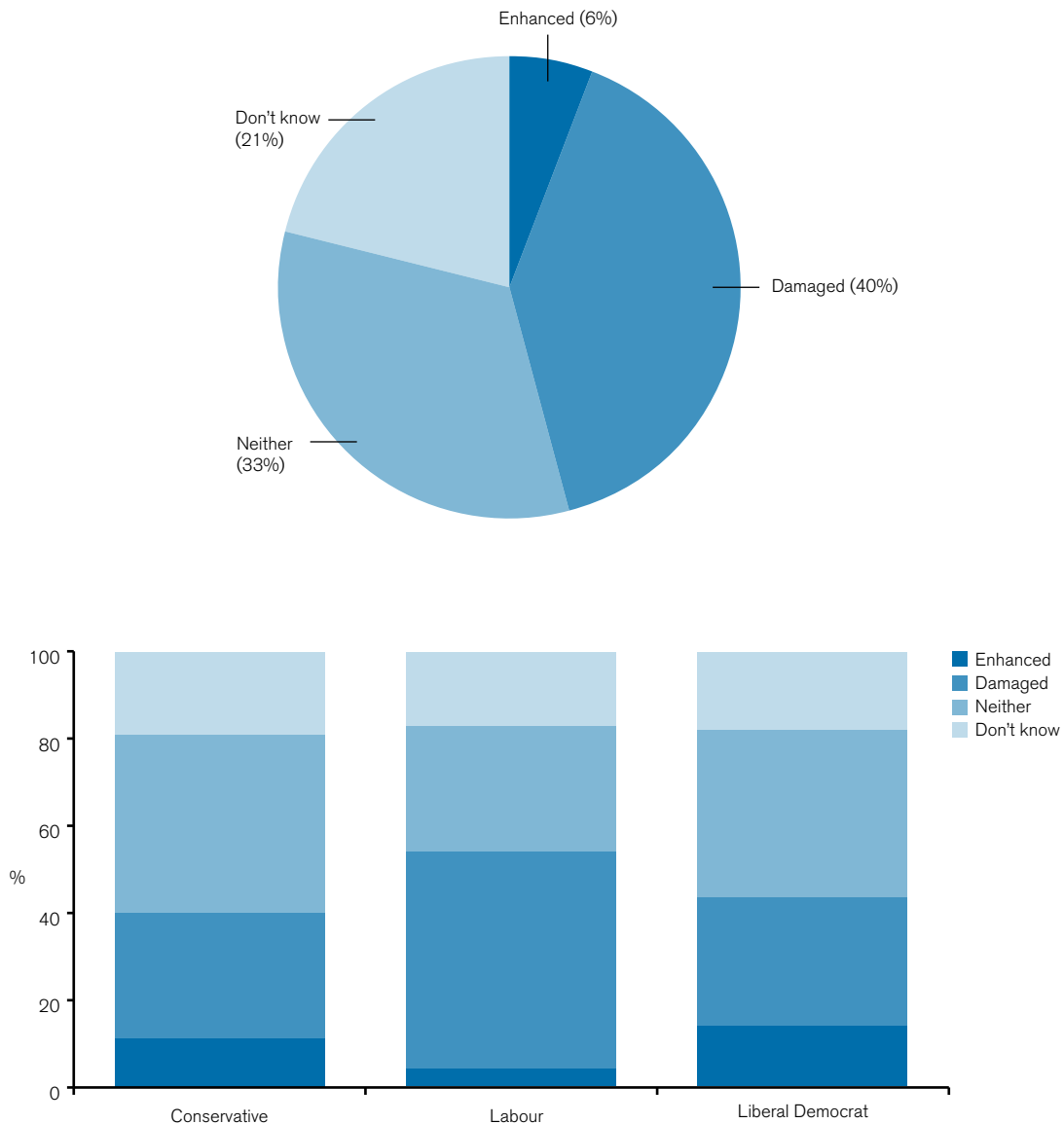
Figure 1b: Opinion-formers' view on the impact of the coalition government on UK foreign policy



Source: Opinion-formers sample

- Only 6% of the general public believed British foreign policy over the last year had enhanced the country's reputation, with 40% believing it had actually been damaged (see Figure 2). A little over half thought that there had been no effect, or had no opinion, as one might expect at this early stage in the government's term. Nonetheless, the political split here was markedly different from the divergence over the question about change, with very low numbers across all three political parties believing at this stage that Britain's reputation abroad had been enhanced.

Figure 2: Generally speaking, do you think British foreign policy over the past year has enhanced or damaged Britain's reputation abroad, or made no difference? (General public sample)



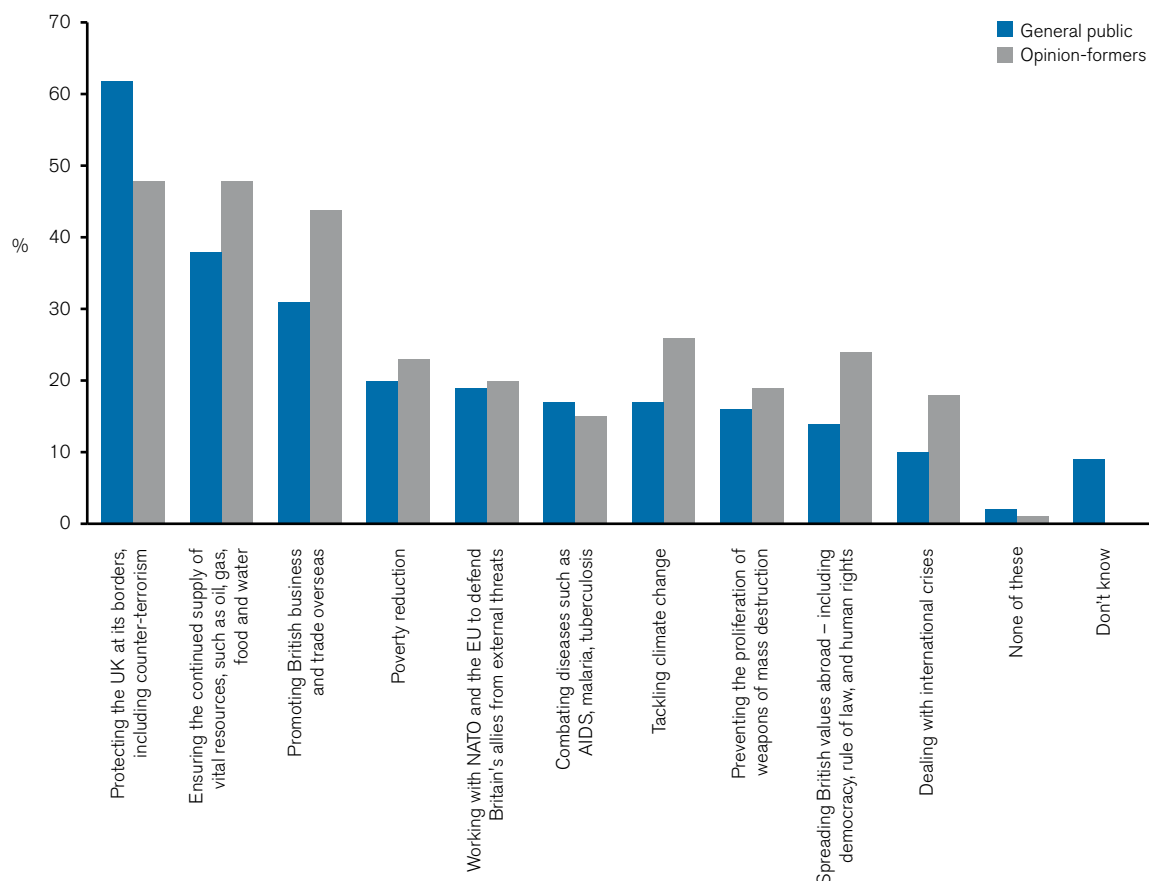
Source: General public sample

Clearly, the conception of a British foreign policy that is, by the government's account and by some objective measures (number of international visits and the allocation of spending, for example), relatively distinct from previous policy appears not to have registered yet with the British public or opinion-formers. The latter may be sceptical about any change at this early stage, while the former may simply be focused on other issues in a time of austerity.

2 Commercial diplomacy and advancing the UK's economic interests

Facing economic austerity at home, the government has placed commercial diplomacy at the centre of its foreign policy. Driving the UK's economic growth by deepening its economic and diplomatic connections with countries whose own growth rates show the greatest promise – such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey – has been a clear priority of the government's first year in office. The FCO's regional ministers have been on the road selling Britain consistently over the past year. William Hague also announced in May an increase in the size of the UK's diplomatic representations in a number of these countries (including 50 new posts in Beijing, 30 in India, with a 'substantial expansion' planned in Brazil, Turkey, Mexico and Indonesia and other additions across South America, Africa and Southeast Asia).⁵ What insights does the survey offer on this aspect of government policy?

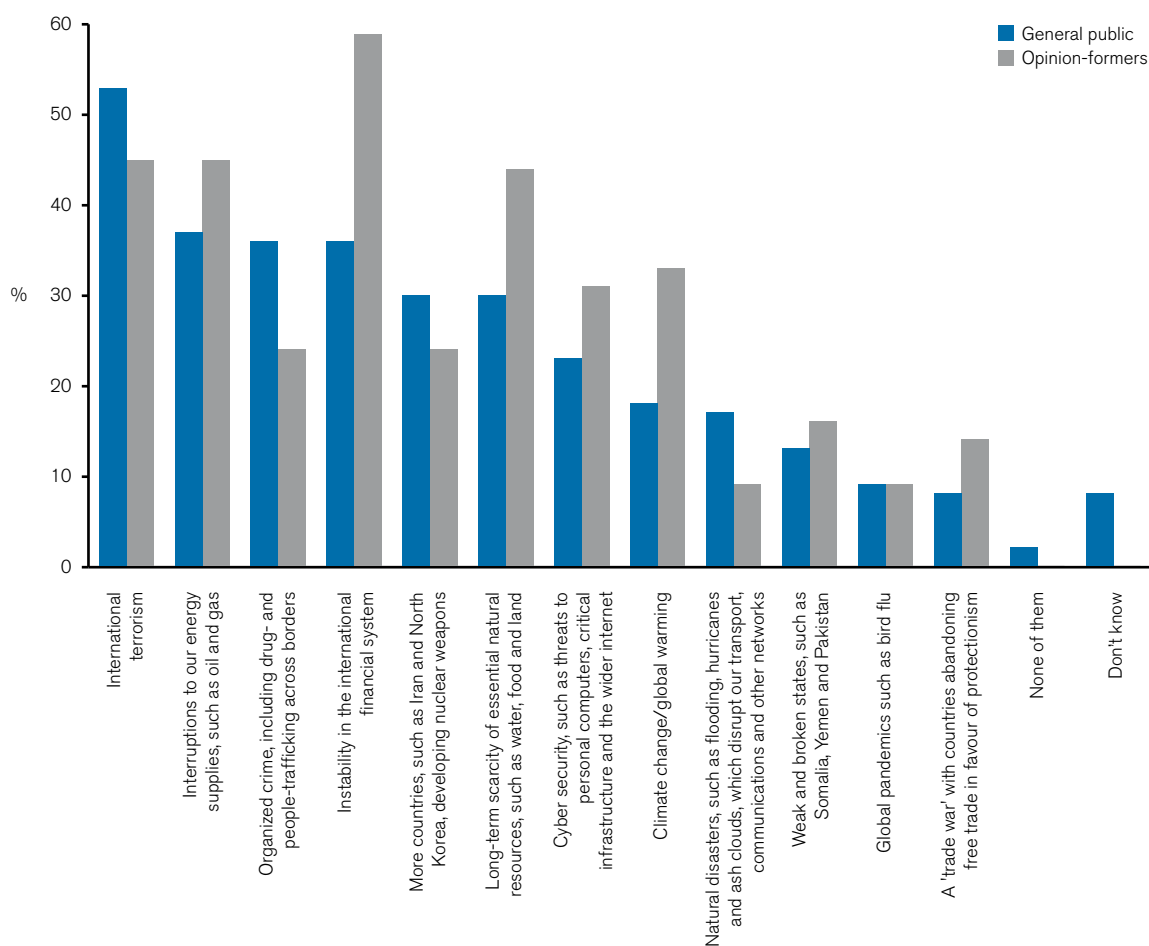
Figure 3: Which two or three, if any, of the following do you think should be the main focus of UK foreign policy? (Respondents could select up to three choices)



⁵ William Hague, 'Announcement to Parliament on the FCO's overseas network', 11 May 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=PressS&id=594693382>.

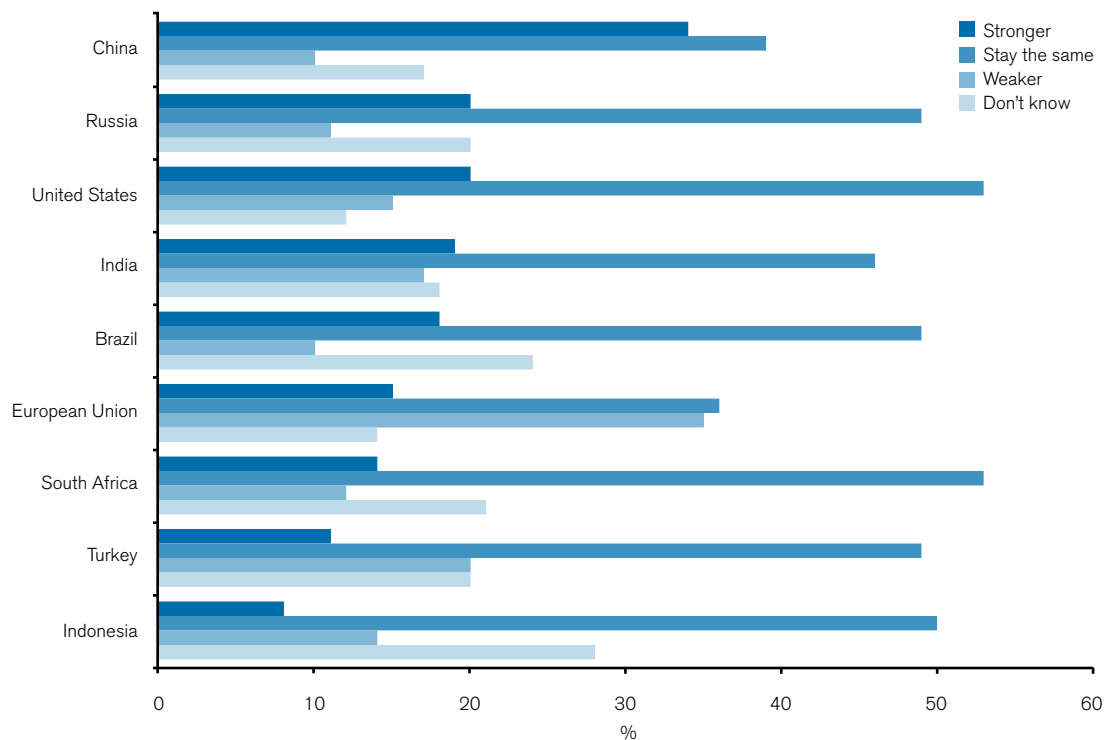
- In terms of foreign policy priorities, ‘promoting British business and trade overseas’ was ranked highly by the public and the opinion-formers, as both groups put this goal in third place out of ten overall (see Figure 3). Importantly, it was two traditionally defensive priorities – ‘protecting the UK at its borders including counter-terrorism’, and ‘securing the supply of vital resources’ – that scored higher for both groups. Other external goals, such as ‘poverty reduction’, ‘tackling climate change’ and ‘dealing with international crises’, came much further down the list.
- In terms of threats to the British way of life, opinion-formers ranked economic-related risks at the top of their list, with ‘instability in the international financial system’ clearly in first position (59%) and ‘interruptions to energy supplies’ and ‘international terrorism’ in equal second place. ‘Scarcity of natural resources’ was ranked a close third (see Figure 4). For the public, ‘international terrorism’ is the overriding threat (53%), but ‘interruptions to energy supplies’ and ‘instability in the financial system’ rank second and joint third respectively – a further reflection of greater concern about economic issues than threats from climate change or failed states.

Figure 4: What do you regard as the greatest threats to the British way of life?
(Respondents could select up to four choices)



- Turning to the question of whether the UK should have stronger or weaker diplomatic ties with emerging economies, a clear majority of the public felt that the UK's relations should stay the same (see Figure 5). To the extent that a preference was indicated, however, those surveyed generally opted for stronger rather than weaker relations (Russia: 20% stronger, 11% weaker; Brazil: 18% stronger, 10% weaker).

Figure 5: Do you think Britain should look to have stronger or weaker diplomatic ties with the following countries and regions, or should the relationship stay the same? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

- Notably, China was the one case where the public was far more positive about strengthening bilateral relations (34% stronger; 39% stay the same; 10% weaker). This is significant not only because of the contrast with other emerging powers, but also because China had a relatively high 'unfavourability' rating in the survey (15%) compared with other emerging powers (generally in the 1–5% range out of a choice of five).
- Overall, however, the emerging economies have not registered a positive impact with the general public – the top five non-European countries with the most favourable rating remain Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Japan (48% to 15%), with only 6% placing Brazil and India in this list and even lower numbers for South Africa, South Korea or Indonesia (see Table 1).

While the public therefore appears to share the government's desire to improve the country's international business and trade linkages, the respondents also appear to be relatively detached from those countries that need to become new points of economic focus for the UK in the future. Broadening the British public's horizons beyond the community of Western countries that represent its comfort zone remains a challenge for the government and UK businesses alike.

Table 1: General public attitudes towards other countries (Respondents could select up to five choices)

| Ranking | Which of the following countries, if any, do you feel especially FAVOURABLE towards? | % | Ranking | And which of the following countries, if any, do you feel especially UNFAVOURABLE towards? | % |
|---------|--|----|---------|--|----|
| 1 | Netherlands | 24 | 1 | Greece | 30 |
| 2 | Sweden | 23 | 2 | Russia | 23 |
| 3 | Norway | 20 | 3 | Turkey | 19 |
| 4 | Switzerland | 20 | 4 | France | 16 |
| 5 | Germany | 19 | 5 | Ireland | 11 |
| 6 | Ireland | 18 | 6 | Poland | 11 |
| 7 | Spain | 18 | 7 | Portugal | 11 |
| 8 | Italy | 17 | 8 | Germany | 10 |
| 9 | France | 16 | 9 | Spain | 9 |
| 10 | Portugal | 8 | 10 | Italy | 7 |
| 11 | Greece | 6 | 11 | Switzerland | 3 |
| 12 | Turkey | 5 | 12 | Netherlands | 1 |
| 13 | Poland | 4 | 13 | Sweden | 1 |
| 14 | Russia | 2 | 14 | Norway | 0 |
| | None of them | 24 | | None of them | 32 |
| | Don't know | 11 | | Don't know | 11 |
| Ranking | Which of the following countries, if any, do you feel especially FAVOURABLE towards? | % | Ranking | And which of the following countries, if any, do you feel especially UNFAVOURABLE towards? | % |
| 1 | Australia | 48 | 1 | Iran | 45 |
| 2 | New Zealand | 47 | 2 | Pakistan | 42 |
| 3 | Canada | 44 | 3 | North Korea | 41 |
| 4 | United States | 31 | 4 | Saudi Arabia | 25 |
| 5 | Japan | 15 | 5 | Israel | 22 |
| 6 | Brazil | 6 | 6 | China | 15 |
| 7 | India | 6 | 7 | India | 11 |
| 8 | South Africa | 6 | 8 | Argentina | 9 |
| 9 | Israel | 5 | 9 | United States | 9 |
| 10 | China | 4 | 10 | Egypt | 8 |
| 11 | Egypt | 4 | 11 | South Africa | 5 |
| 12 | Mexico | 3 | 12 | South Korea | 5 |
| 13 | South Korea | 3 | 13 | Indonesia | 2 |
| 14 | Argentina | 2 | 14 | Japan | 2 |
| 15 | Indonesia | 1 | 15 | Mexico | 2 |
| 16 | Iran | 1 | 16 | Australia | 1 |
| 17 | Pakistan | 1 | 17 | Brazil | 1 |
| 18 | Saudi Arabia | 1 | 18 | Canada | 0 |
| 19 | North Korea | 0 | 19 | New Zealand | 0 |
| | None of them | 18 | | None of them | 20 |
| | Don't know | 9 | | Don't know | 10 |

Testing Chinese soft power

Kerry Brown

Head, Asia Programme

The Chinese government has invested billions in its soft-power message since the mid-2000s. Over \$40 billion was spent on the 2008 Olympics. The 2010 Shanghai Expo followed the same path – displaying China's softer side, showcasing its cultural attributes, promoting the message that whatever its political differences with the West, it was a benign, modernizing and positive influence on the world. In the last five years, Chinese government money has gone into creating dozens of Confucius Institutes throughout Europe, many of them in the UK, teaching Chinese language and promoting Chinese culture. According to these survey results, however, the Chinese government has so far got a poor return on its investment. Irrespective of gender or political leaning, only 4% of general public respondents have a favourable image of the country, while 15% regard it unfavourably.

The poor survey results therefore show a clear failure of the campaigns so far mounted by the Chinese government. The message here for China is that it simply does not yet understand how soft power works. British people tend to like Chinese food, and growing numbers are visiting China as tourists. There is increasing interest in studying the language in schools. Perhaps it should not just cease official campaigns but also allow non-state actors on both sides to do more of this work.

The much more positive showing on whether the UK should try to strengthen its diplomatic links with China will be of some encouragement. But for those engaged with China in the UK, it is time to realize that the government of one of the world's major powers, and a force that will increasingly influence our future, is simply not able to get across a more nuanced, complex image of its country and people. UK-based experts and commentators on China are going to have their work cut out as they attempt to explain why China is simply not as bad as this survey suggests.

Following the government's lead on Africa?

Tom Cargill

Assistant Head, Africa Programme

The UK prime ministerial tour of several African countries, coinciding with the launch of this survey, jars with the minimal interest afforded to Africa as a foreign policy issue among either the UK public or opinion-formers. South Africa is mentioned but provokes no strong feelings. The rest is passed over in silence. Does this mean the prime minister and the government are wrong to be going to Africa at all?

Quite the reverse. Africa has been changing dramatically over the past 10 years, with stability and economic governance improving. In addition, Africa's 25% share of UN votes is being wooed by ever more suitors, particularly when it comes to decisions on trade and sanctions. In both these areas the usual BRIC country suspects (Brazil, Russia, India and China) are increasingly active, but so are others, including Germany, Iran and South Korea. The UK government, to its credit, appears to have worked this out quickly, although it is hamstrung by the decline in diplomatic assets at home and abroad.

This survey indicates elsewhere that both the public and opinion-formers underestimate the value of diplomats. In fact, the results on the ground on Africa show that the government's strong messaging on the importance of its aid and financial commitments – a key factor in enabling African states to become productive trading partners of the UK – appears to be having a positive impact, albeit marginally. Overall, the survey suggests that in thinking about Africa, the British government is ahead of its public. It will be interesting to see if the prime minister's tour will make others, including in business, think again about Africa's relevance to UK interests.

Russia: out in the cold?

James Nixey

Manager and Research Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme

Russia's poor showing in this survey – it generally comes lowest every time it is explicitly mentioned – is unsurprising (Greece actually performs worse in one area but that is an anomaly due to recent events). Russia is the furthest away, most 'alien', and essentially the least 'European' country in the broadly defined Europe section – very much the outsider in every sense. So even in an ideal world, in which Russia was a more amenable partner than it currently is, it would still feature low on the list. Geographic distance and an uncomfortable history seem to count for a lot too as Russia's near neighbours, Turkey and Poland, also rank at the lower end. An additional factor may also be that the countries at the bottom of the Europe section have the poorest levels of spoken English; communicating with them is quite literally more difficult. Beyond Europe, however, Russia at least fares considerably better than most of the old 'Axis of Evil' states (and Pakistan), suggesting that its unfavourable status is only of secondary order.

One possible (if small) bright spot, for Russia, is that the 18–25-year-olds surveyed – those unencumbered with first-hand memories of the Soviet era, the 'wild' 1990s and, in some cases, the last up-and-down decade – do appear to look on Russia slightly more favourably than their elders. Perhaps generational change in the UK will lead to more favourable dispositions towards Russia as the attitudes of the Cold War generation continue to fade.

Finally, with regard to the question on the strength of the UK's diplomatic ties with Russia, it is slightly depressing to note that the UK has fairly poor relations with Russia, but that most of those surveyed do not know or do not care. The relationship has seen some improvement in the past year. But this could be easily broken, as it is based largely on the correspondingly fragile US–Russia 'reset'.

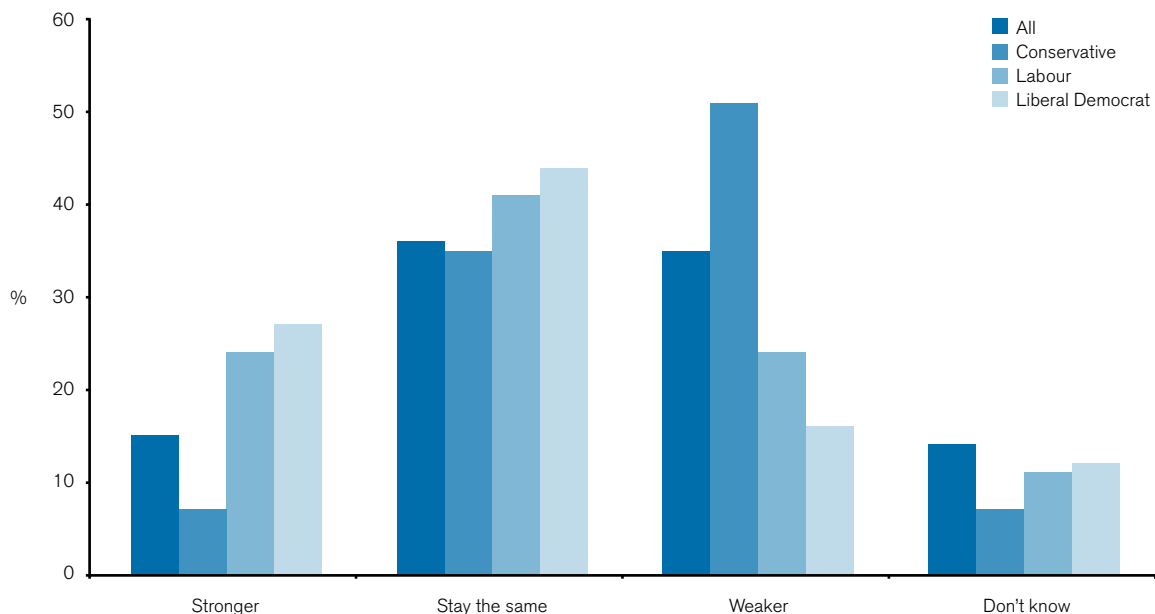
3 Redefining UK relations with the European Union and the United States

The pragmatic approach that the coalition government has taken towards its relations with the US and within the EU over the past year sits well with the overall attitude of both the UK general public and opinion-formers. This attitude, however, reflects the balance of two seemingly contradictory instincts – first, widespread scepticism towards the EU as an institution, and ambivalence towards the US as a partner; and, second, willingness by clear majorities across all party affiliations to see closer UK cooperation with both the EU and with the US on particular issues that cannot be tackled at a national level.

Attitudes to the EU

- The EU stands out in responses to the question about the countries or regions with which the UK should have stronger or weaker ties: 35% of the public thought the UK should have weaker relations with the EU against 15% who felt they should be stronger, and only 36% arguing that they should stay the same (interestingly, this is the opposite of the public's response on China – see Figure 5).
- Similarly, in the question about which international institutions people felt positive or negative towards, the EU came *last* in the list of nine institutions for *both* groups. Both the public (64%) and opinion-formers (56%) believed strongly that the UK spent too much on its EU contributions, as opposed to 19% and 37%, respectively, believing the UK was spending 'about the right amount'.

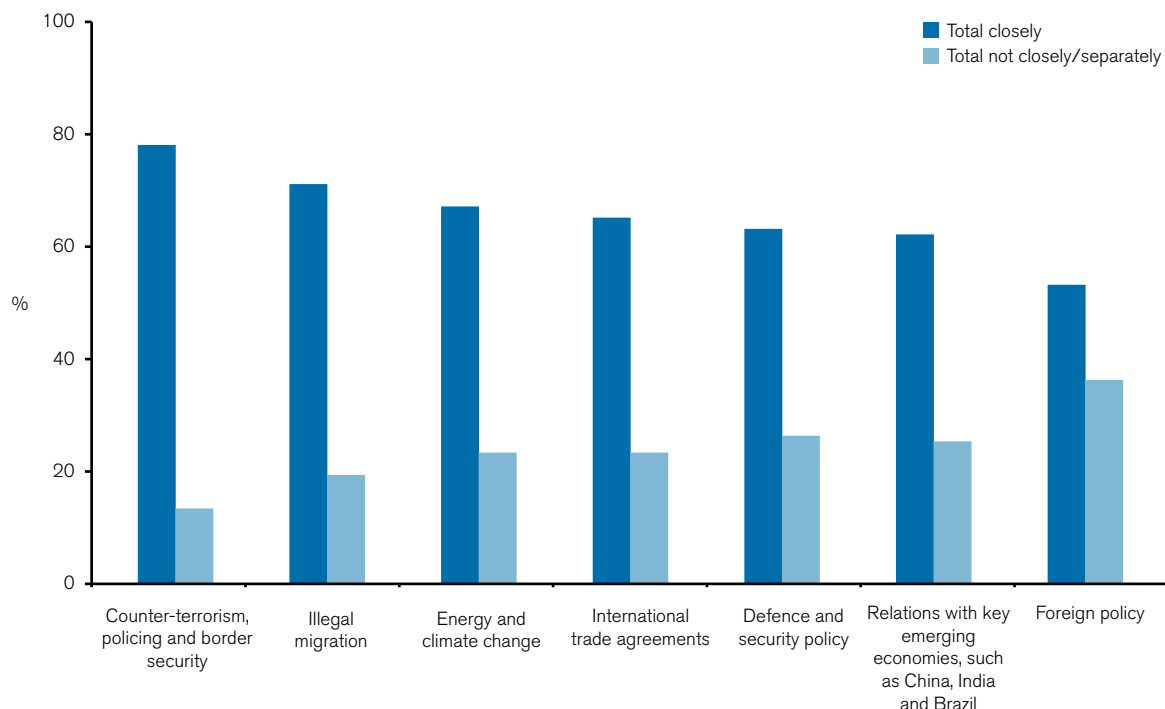
Figure 6: Do you think Britain should look to have stronger or weaker diplomatic ties with the European Union, or should the relationship stay the same? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

- By contrast, when asked whether the UK should work closely with the EU in particular policy areas, the results in favour ('total closely') exceeded those against ('total not closely/separately') by a wide margin in *every* case (see Figure 7). On counter-terrorism cooperation, for example, 78% of the general public favoured 'total closely' versus 13% 'total not closely/separately'; on illegal migration the contrasting figures were 71% 'total closely' versus 19% 'total not closely/separately'. Even on the contested issue of defence and security policy, the result was 63% 'total closely' versus 26% 'total not closely/separately'.
- The opinion-formers and the public had identical rankings for issues on which the UK should work with the rest of the EU, and for both groups cooperation on foreign policy was by far the least favoured option, but overall, opinion-formers had 'total closely' scores anywhere from 13% to 18% higher than the public.
- The desire to work with the EU has not declined since last year's results, despite the deepening economic crisis that has afflicted much of the Eurozone since then.

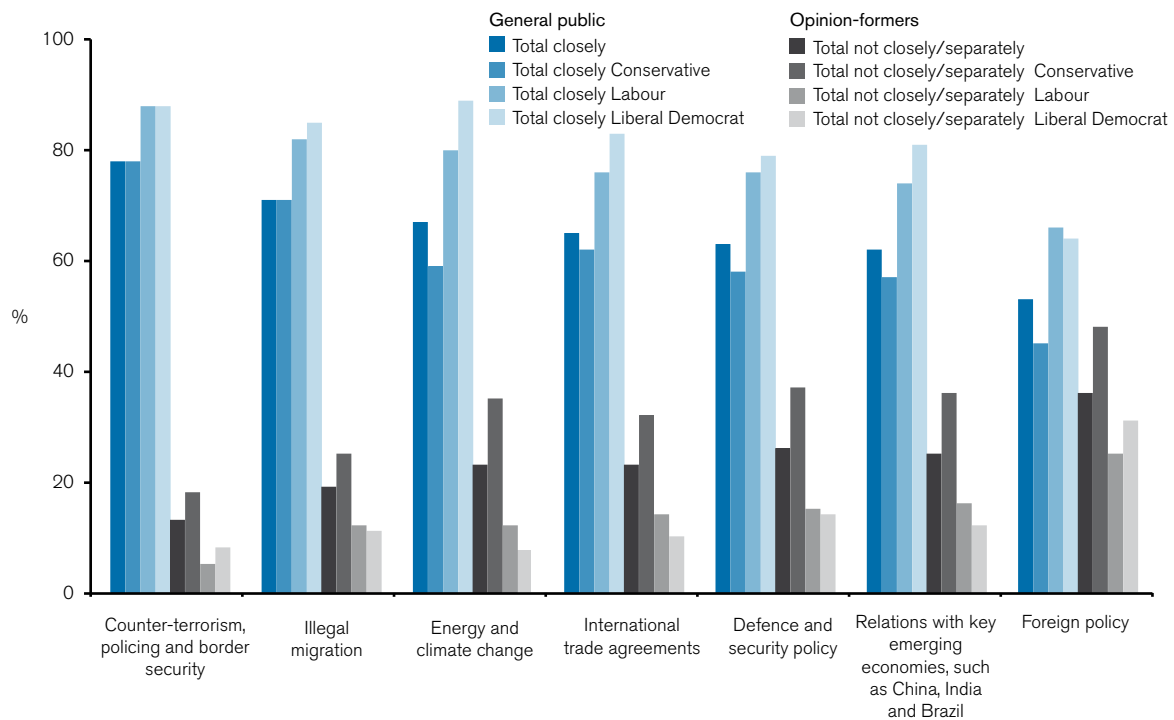
Figure 7: Should the UK work closely or not closely with the EU on the following areas? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

- As would be expected, Conservative voters have a significantly lower opinion of the EU as an institution than either Labour or Liberal Democrat voters – 51% of Conservative supporters felt the UK should have weaker relations with the EU versus only 7% feeling they should be stronger and 35% the same (see Figure 6). For Labour supporters the figures were 24% stronger, 41% the same, 24% weaker and for Liberal Democrat supporters 27%, 44% and 16%, respectively.
- But, by wide margins, Conservative voters still favoured working with the EU on specific policy issues, even if these margins were lower than those for the other two parties. On counter-terrorism, policing and border security (all Conservative shibboleths), 78% of Conservative supporters stood in the 'total closely' column, as against 18% in 'total not closely'. Similarly, on defence and security policy, the respective figures were 58% and 37%. Only in foreign policy did a majority of Conservative supporters opt in total for not closely (48%), although nearly the same percentage (45%) accounted for 'total closely'.

Figure 8: Should the the UK work closely or not closely with the EU on the following areas?



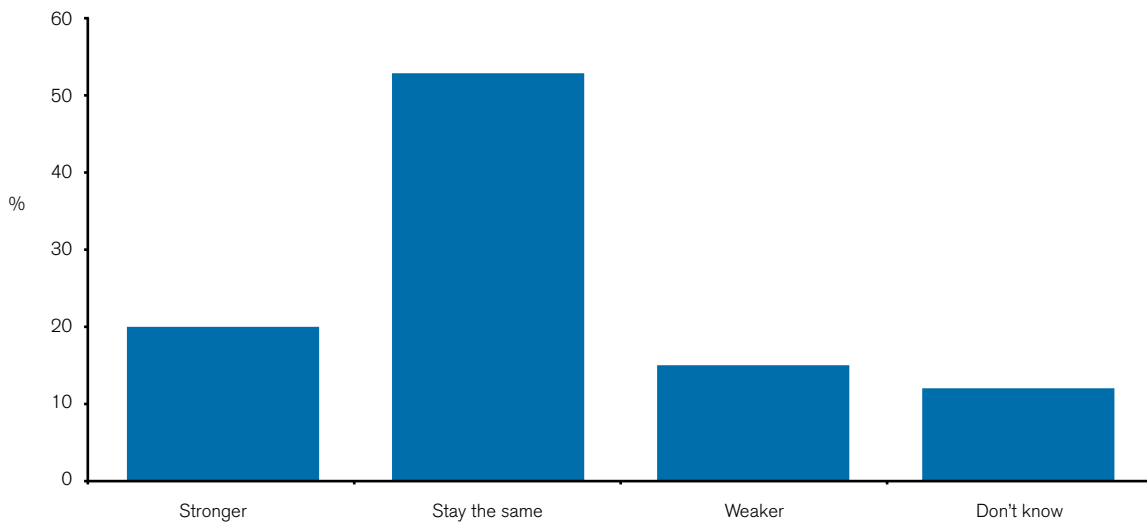
The government's approach towards working with the EU therefore appears to tally fairly well with the instincts of the electorate. The European Union Bill has been successfully passed by Parliament, which requires approval by referendum of any future concession of UK sovereignty to EU institutions. But it has not allowed popular British scepticism towards European integration to undermine the potential for practical cooperation with the UK's EU partners in specific areas over the past year. This includes in fighting organized crime and cooperating on counter-terrorism, despite increasing grumbles from Conservative backbenchers who had expected a more robust Eurosceptic approach.

Attitudes to the US

- The general public appears to be comfortable with the UK's relationship with the US: 53% of respondents said the relationship should stay the same, the joint highest figure in this category of the nine countries surveyed (20% favoured stronger ties and 15% weaker). In terms of overall attitudes to the US, 31% had a favourable view, while 9% had an unfavourable view. While this did not compare particularly well with Australia, New Zealand and Canada (respectively 48%, 47% and 44% favourable), this still represents a positive result.
- The desire for the UK to work closely with the US on specific policies was widespread in every category, with 'counter-terrorism' (74% 'total closely'), 'defence and security policy' (68% 'total closely') and 'international trade agreements' (63% 'total closely') being the top three areas for the general public.
- Interestingly, the totals among the general public in favour of working closely with the US tallied almost exactly with the numbers favouring working closely with the EU. In fact, on foreign policy, the 'total closely' (53%) and 'total not closely/separately' (36%) scores were exactly the same.
- The opinion-formers chose the same top three areas for cooperation with the US, but with slightly less enthusiasm than they did for working with the EU in all categories. The one area where the opinion-formers showed noticeably less desire to work closely with the US was on relations with the key emerging economies (59% 'total closely' with the US versus 76% with the EU).

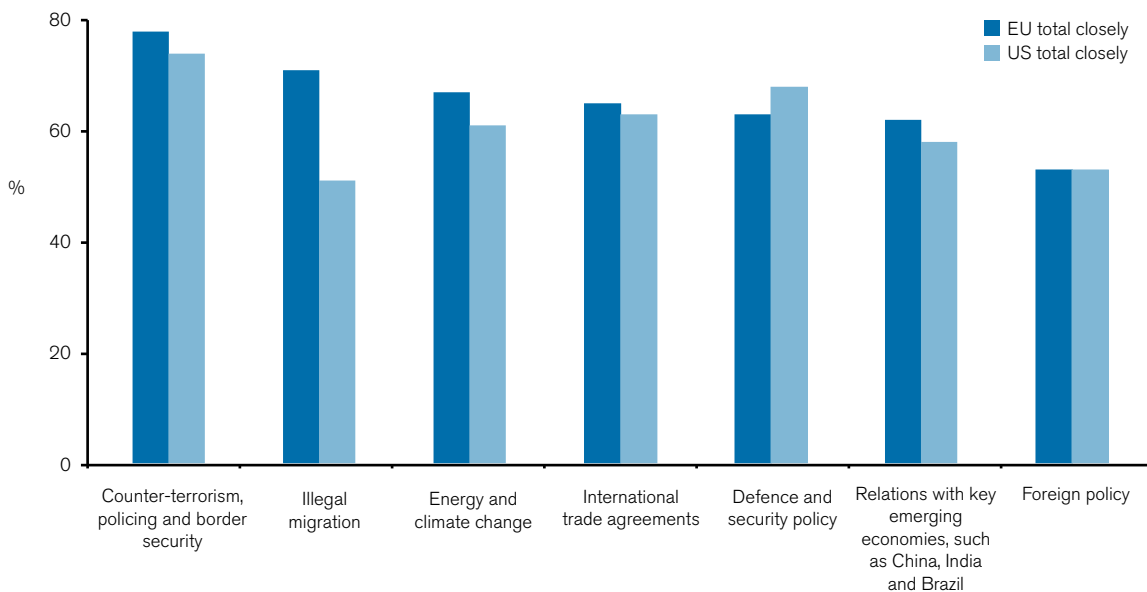
Again, the coalition government’s approach to the United States appears to tally well with public opinion. It has sought to redefine the relationship as one that is ‘essential’ rather than ‘special’, a sentiment that reflects some of the public caution about over-closeness; this also chimes with the view expressed by Conservative leaders in opposition that the relationship should be ‘solid but not slavish.’⁶ Indeed, the government has taken some publicly divergent positions from the US in its first year (the UK became the global leader on spending cuts even as the Obama administration argued for further stimulus measures, and voted against Israeli settlement policy in the UN Security Council). More recently, however, the government has taken steps to strengthen bilateral ties on issues of mutual interest, such as the creation of the Joint Strategy Board to coordinate closely the work of the UK and US National Security Councils on future challenges and long-term planning.

Figure 9: Do you think Britain should look to have stronger or weaker diplomatic ties with the US, or should the relationship stay the same? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

Figure 10: Comparing public attitudes on cooperation with the EU and US



Source: General public sample

6 David Cameron and Barack Obama, 'Not just special, but an essential relationship', *The Times*, 24 May 2011, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article3033133.ece>; William Hague, 'Thinking ahead: the foreign policy of the next Conservative government', Chatham House, 31 January 2007, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/8305_310107hague.pdf; David Cameron, 'A new approach to foreign affairs – liberal conservatism', 11 September 2006, http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/09/Cameron_A_new_approach_to_foreign_affairs_liberal_conservatism.aspx.

An 'essential' relationship?

Xenia Dormandy

Senior Fellow, US International Role

In the light of the oft-quoted perception of American decline, it is perhaps surprising to see that the majority of the general public surveyed (73%) want diplomatic ties with the United States to stay the same or be strengthened. This is on a par with views on China (also 73%) and marginally higher than those on other leading emerging economies. What may be of greater concern for those who believe in the importance of maintaining a strong transatlantic relationship is that support for close relations declines with decreasing age, with 18–24-year-olds being the least supportive. This trend by age is notably less apparent in attitudes towards other rising economies.

The survey clearly reveals that on hard defence and security issues, both UK opinion-formers and the general public believe Britain should work more closely with the United States. It is, in fact, only in this substantive area that either group sees working closely with the US as more important than with the EU.

While there is much support for working closely with the US in such hard-power areas, on the broader issue of foreign policy the level of support from opinion-formers and the general public for working closely with the US diminishes quite significantly (although it has improved in the last year among the general public in particular). There appears to be a distinction in the minds of both groups between conducting a close foreign policy and a close security policy. These results are also paralleled by those for working with the EU on foreign policy. The British, whether opinion-formers or the general public, clearly value an independent foreign policy.

In almost all areas, UK opinion-formers are more convinced than the general public that working closely with the US is important. On the issue areas themselves the trend lines are very similar, with opinion-formers being generally more supportive. The distinction between opinion-formers and general public support is also apparent in the differences of attitude to working closely with the EU (opinion-formers being more supportive). But it is interesting that these differences in attitudes are smaller *vis-à-vis* the US than the EU; working with the US appears to be a less divisive or politically sensitive issue. This is borne out by the views held by those with different political leanings: the divisions on the EU between those holding Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour views are greater than on the US.

What do all these results mean about the transatlantic relationship today and in the coming years? The disparity between public and opinion-formers in terms of support for engagement with the US means that the coalition government will need to build strong arguments to explain the importance of bilateral cooperation. The survey results suggest that it should focus action on the hard-power arenas that take advantage of the perceived strengths of the United States, while at the same time devoting more attention to explaining the US's value added in other areas such as engaging emerging markets and climate change to try to build support for broader bilateral activity.

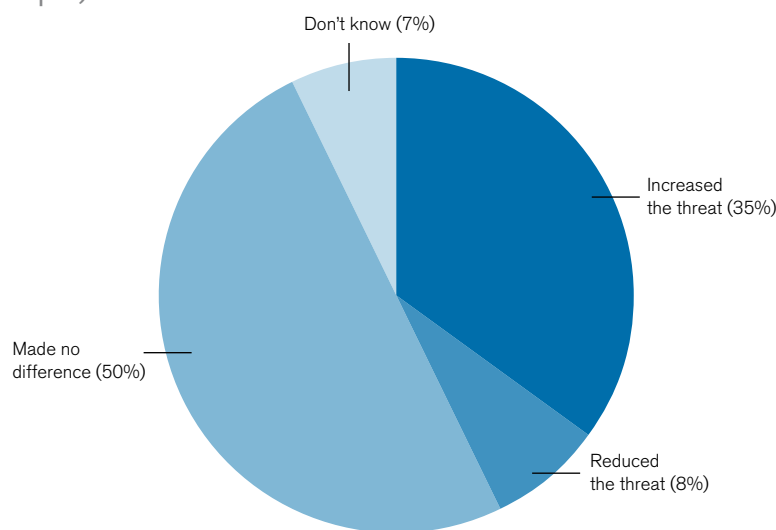
4 A more integrated approach to security, defence and development

In both rhetorical and organizational terms, the coalition government has sought to present a more integrated approach to UK security. The creation of the National Security Council brings together under the Prime Minister's chairmanship the Secretaries of State of all of the government departments with a significant stake in the country's external relations (Defence, Energy and Climate Change, FCO, Home, International Development and Treasury; the chiefs of the intelligence and armed services attend as required). The decision to retain the target of raising UK spending on development assistance to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2013, for example, co-exists with a new emphasis on the security dimensions of development in crisis-ridden countries around the world, which now accounts for 30% of UK spending on official development assistance.⁷ How does the coalition government's approach to security match up with the perceptions of the general public and opinion-formers?

Security

- By a significant margin, the general public regarded 'international terrorism' as the overriding threat to the British way of life – 53%, against the next threat on the list, 'interruption of energy supplies', at 37% (as noted above in Figure 4, page 6). For their part, the opinion-formers placed these two threats in equal second place at 45% ('instability in the international financial system' being their number one concern).
- On the threat of terrorist attacks in the UK, 50% of the public believed that the killing of Osama bin Laden had made no difference, while 35% believed the threat had actually increased and only 8% believed that it had declined (see Figure 11).

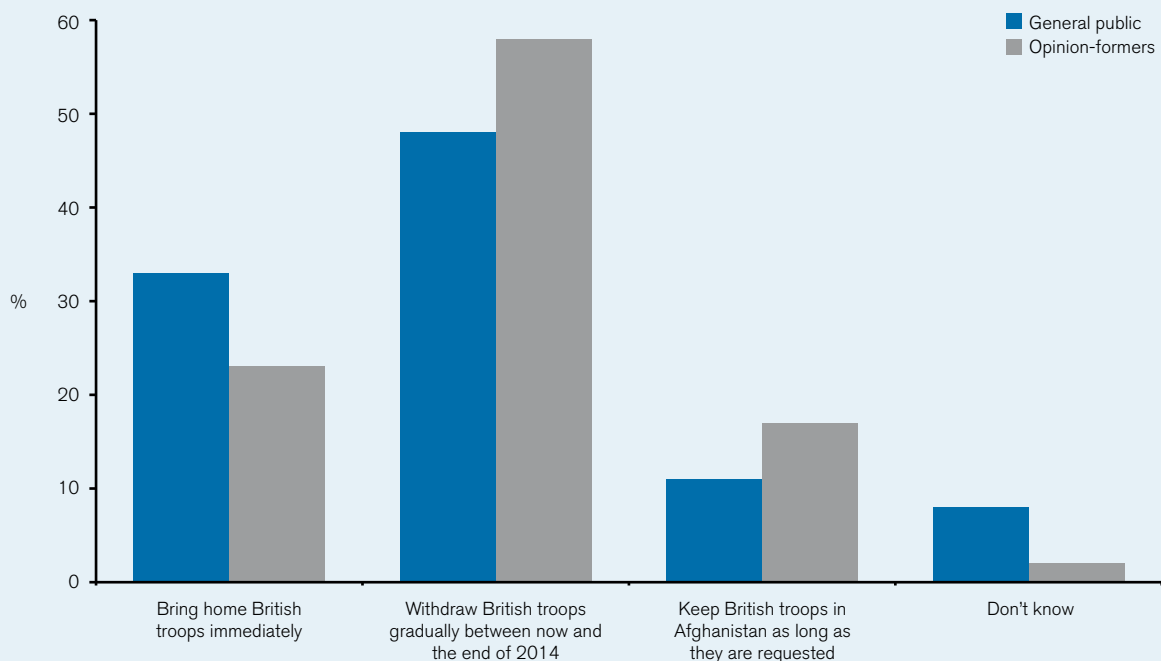
Figure 11: Do you think that the assassination of Osama bin Laden has increased, reduced or made no difference to the threat of terrorist attacks here in the UK? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

- It follows that a strong majority (62%) of the general public believed that protecting the UK at its borders (including counter-terrorism) should be the main focus of British foreign policy (as noted above in Figure 3, page 5). 'Ensuring the continued supply of vital resources, including oil and gas' came a distant second at 38%.
- Both the opinion-formers and the general public gave a low rating to more traditional security threats, such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and dealing with international crises, including in weak and broken states (such as Yemen and Pakistan), which are the incubators of many of the terrorist threats to the UK.

Figure 12: Views on the UK's military presence in Afghanistan



Afghanistan: consensus on withdrawal

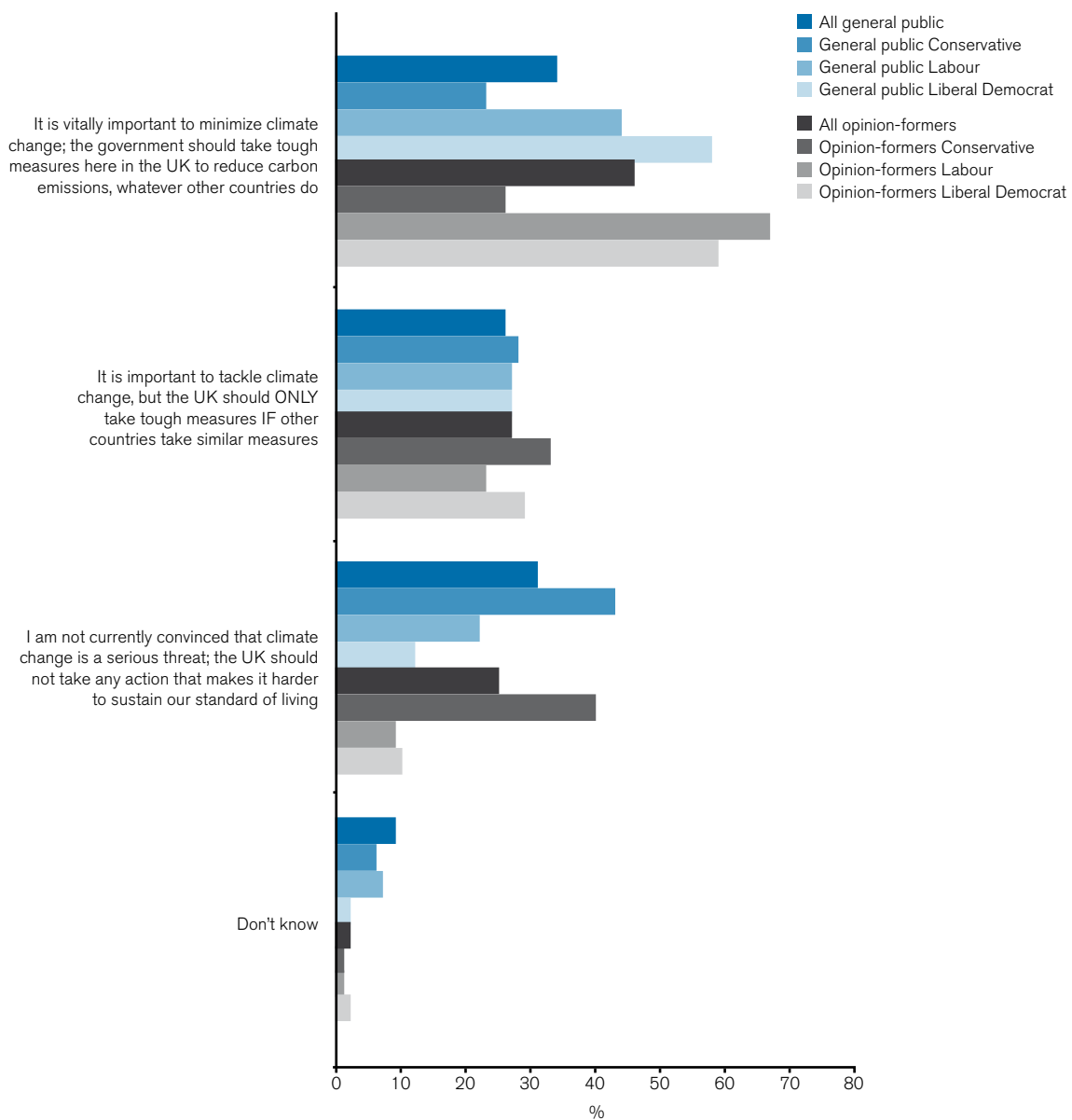
Gareth Price

Senior Research Fellow, South Asia, Asia Programme

Although international terrorism ranks highly as a threat among opinion-formers, the problems of weak and failing states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan do not. The divergence between opinion-formers and the general public in relation to Afghanistan is not as great as might have been supposed. Among opinion-formers around 58% support the current strategy of gradually reducing troops and leaving by the end of 2014 (see Figure 12). The remainder are split roughly equally between those wanting an immediate withdrawal and those wanting to remain indefinitely. Among the public at large, 48% support the current strategy, whereas 33% hope for an immediate withdrawal (compared with 23% of opinion-formers). Far smaller proportions of both the public (11%) and opinion-formers (17%) were in favour of troops remaining as long as requested. While this fits with the assumption that the public is war-weary, the government's current strategy appears to chime with public opinion.

- At the same time, the general public did not appear to agree with the government’s established view that development assistance protects the UK’s national interests and long-term security. Only 27% thought it should be protected from cuts for this reason, whereas 57% argued that development assistance should be radically reduced. However, the opinion-formers took largely the opposite view, with 53% arguing development assistance should be protected in order to support UK security and 39% saying it should be cut.
- Similarly, on the threat that climate change represents to the UK, the relatively strong support in the 2010 survey (37% of the public and 50% of opinion-formers) for the government taking ‘tough measures to reduce carbon emissions, whatever other countries do’ has weakened marginally in 2011 to 34% and 46%, respectively (see Figure 13). These figures tally with the fact that climate change came only 8th on the public’s list of threats to the British way of life (with merely 18% support) whereas 33% of opinion-formers ranked climate change 5th on their list.

Figure 13: Attitudes on action to address climate change



Changing minds on climate change?

Bernice Lee

Research Director, Energy, Environment and Resource Governance

While the general public sees climate change as a relatively low priority for foreign policy, 60% believe Britain should tackle climate change – whether unilaterally or making action conditional on the actions of others. Policy-makers have failed to persuade 31% of the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Not surprisingly, views about climate change are split along party lines. It is ranked among the top four threats to the British way of life by just 12% of prospective Conservative voters, as against 23% of Labour and 33% of Liberal Democrat supporters. More of the opinion-formers – some 14% of Conservative, 54% of Labour and 41% of Liberal Democrat supporters – view climate change as a high priority. There is a marked disconnect between opinion-formers and general public respondents intending to vote Labour – one of the highest discrepancies among the international issues surveyed.

Opinion-formers and the general public also differ when considering appropriate strategies for the UK in tackling climate change. While 46% of opinion-formers argue that climate mitigation should take place irrespective of other governments' approaches (down 4% on last year), 27% believe Britain's action should be conditional on those of others, while 25% think that no action is needed. Those working in businesses are also far more cautious than civil servants and political advisers when it comes to unilateral climate action.

Defence

- Despite the low ranking for 'working with NATO and the EU to defend Britain's allies from external threats', there was a strong consensus between the public (64%) and the opinion-formers (63%) that the government was spending 'too little' on equipping Britain's armed forces. Only 17% of the public and 25% of the opinion-formers believed the 'right amount' was spent in this area.
- Similarly, the general public remains relatively bullish about renewing the UK's nuclear deterrent, despite the difficult political case and the heavy cuts being made in other areas. Those saying the country was spending 'about the right amount' (33%) or 'too little' (10%) (along with 23% 'don't know') together outnumbered those saying that 'too much' was being spent in this area (34%). For the opinion-formers, however, there was no such uncertainty: 54% responded 'too much', with only 29% 'about the right amount' and only 7% 'don't know'.

Development

- Asked about the level of government spending on aid, 57% of the public said that the government spent 'too much', compared with 24% responding 'about the right amount'. By contrast, among the opinion-formers, a much lower proportion (37%) thought it was 'too much', with 47% seeing it as 'about the right amount' (13% of the opinion-formers thought 'too little' was spent, as opposed to 7% of the public).
- The general public's view of development spending reflects the fact that only 18% thought that the Department for International Development (DFID) and UK aid served Britain's national interests, whereas, for the opinion-formers, it was 33%.⁸
- For both the public and the opinion-formers, development-related objectives such as 'poverty reduction' and 'combating diseases' (e.g. AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis) were not ranked highly

⁸ These figures are based on the respondents selecting up to three items.

in terms of whether they should be a priority focus of UK foreign policy. Poverty reduction came fourth on the general public's list, although, at 20%, it was far below the 62% that selected protecting the UK at its borders. For the opinion-formers, poverty reduction came 6th (23%), behind other priorities that included hard security, climate change and the promotion of British values.⁹

Development: under fire at home

Rob Bailey

Senior Research Fellow, Energy, Environment and Resource Governance

Perhaps unsurprisingly in the current economic climate, support for development spending among the general public is low, with 57% believing the UK spends too much on aid. C2DEs are considerably more likely to hold this view than ABC1s.^a Among opinion-formers the figure is less pronounced at 37%, with a robust 47% thinking aid spending is about right. This presents a challenge for the UK government, which has committed to raise it from the current level of 0.56% of GNI to 0.7% by 2013. The challenge may be compounded by the fact that across both opinion-formers and the general public, support for aid is weakest among prospective Conservative voters and strongest among prospective Liberal Democrat voters. This may create tensions for the coalition if support for aid continues to wane as domestic austerity measures bite.

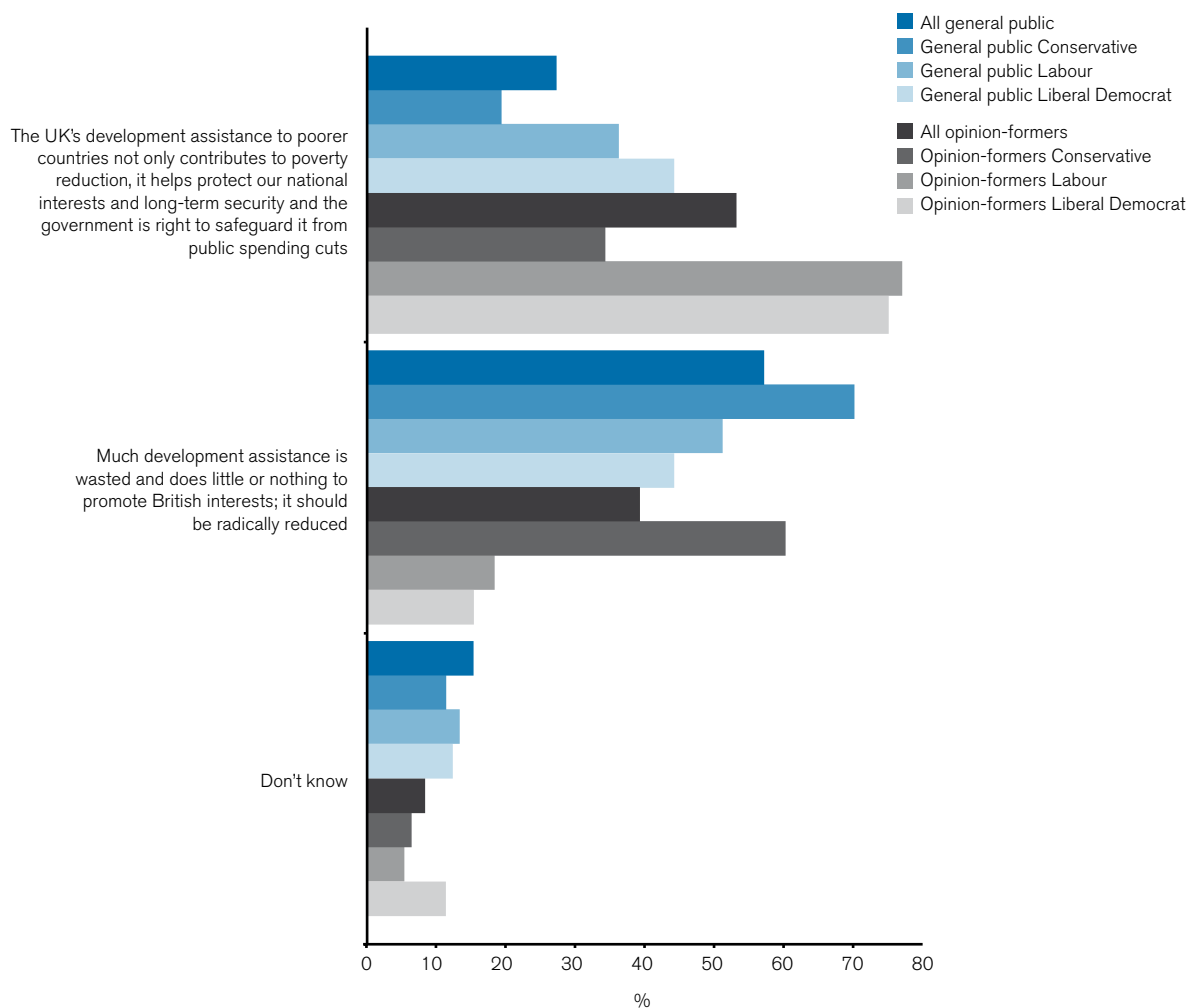
Both the general public and opinion-formers consider aid largely irrelevant to Britain's international reputation, and as playing only a small role in serving national interests. This suggests that one argument in defence of aid employed by the Secretary of State for International Development, that Britain is an 'Aid Superpower', is unlikely to resonate with voters, despite the fact that the UK is viewed internationally as a leader.

Would an international development strategy focused on sustainable, equitable and secure access to resources win greater voter approval? Maybe: as we have seen, there is a strong convergence in opinion that resource insecurity is a major threat to the UK and should be a foreign policy priority. This need not be window dressing, as there is a growing body of expert opinion that identifies resource scarcity as the major development challenge for the 21st century.

As ever, the risk with any alignment strategy is that development is captured by foreign policy concerns, and the efficacy of assistance is reduced. Nevertheless, there are good arguments – technical, economic and political – for looking at development through the lens of resource scarcity.

a These grades are used to classify sections of UK society according to socio-economic status. Broadly speaking, ABC1 refers to the middle-income respondents, while C2DE refers to the lower-income respondents.

Figure 14: Attitudes on the UK's development assistance

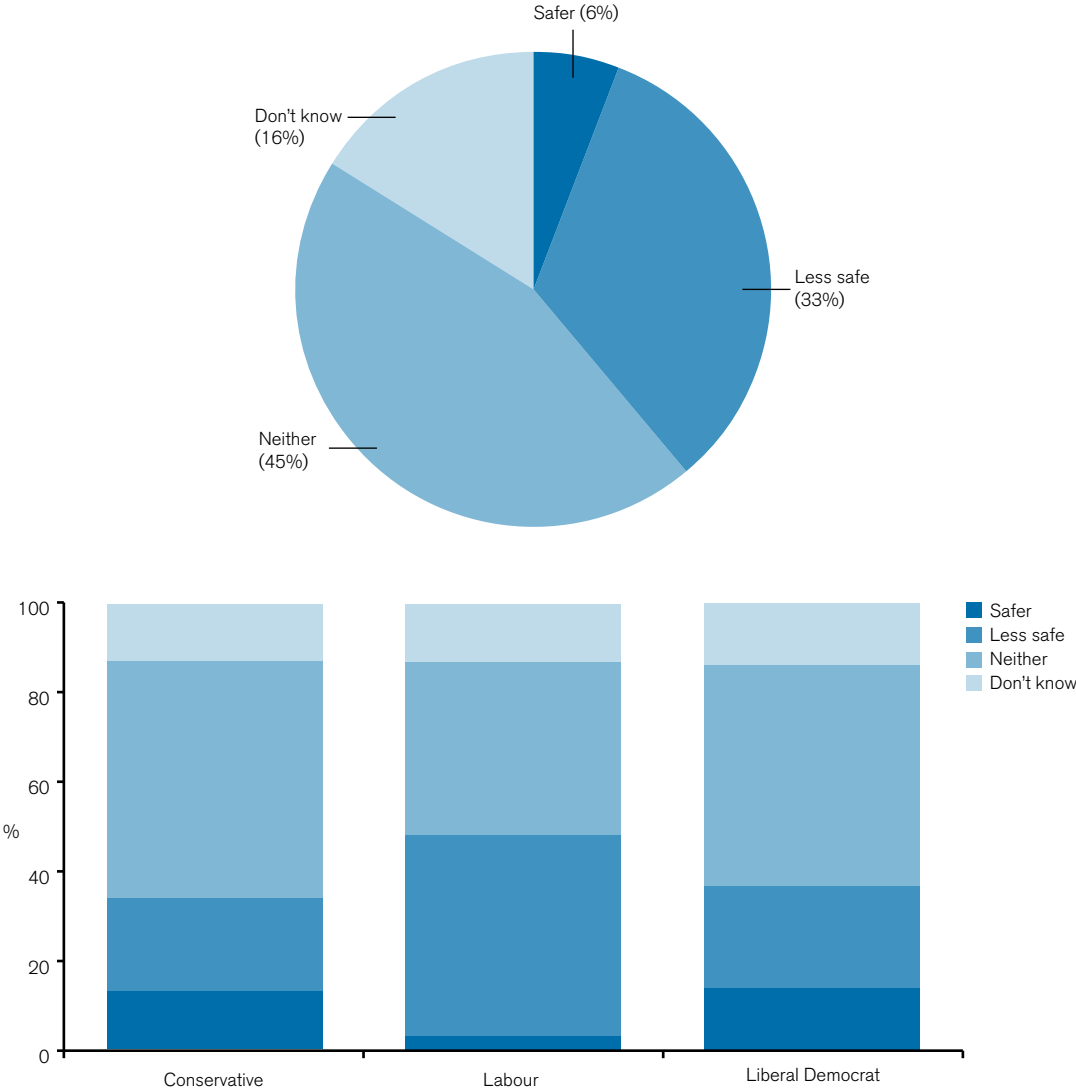


Looking at the results in the areas of security, defence and development, the coalition government faces a growing dilemma. The public and, to a lesser extent, the opinion-formers appear to be more focused on threats to UK domestic security instead of on international crises and instability far from Britain's shores. Similarly, when asked about what should be the main focus of UK foreign policy, only 19% opted for 'working with allies against external threats' and 10% for 'dealing with international crises', in contrast to 31% in favour of 'promoting British business and trade overseas'.

On the one hand, this provides some political space for the government to carry out cuts in defence spending. On the other hand, there seems to be little appreciation among the public of the linkage between instability at the international level and domestic security, whether in the form of spillover from crises in particular countries or of the domestic impact from global trends such as climate change or WMD proliferation. This disconnect can cause problems for the government, as is the case now with the limited public support for UK action in Libya – which is explored in more detail below – and the growing popular frustration with the coalition's commitment to development spending. The discrepancy between public perceptions and the government's efforts to introduce a more integrated approach to security is apparent in the survey:

- When asked whether UK foreign policy had made the UK safer during the past year, 45% of the general public responded that it had made no difference; 33% said that the UK was less safe and only 6% thought it had made the UK safer.

Figure 15: Do you think UK foreign policy has made Britain safer or less safe, or made no difference over the past year? (General public sample)



Source: General public sample

Emerging resource security challenges

Charles Emmerson

Senior Research Fellow, Energy, Environment and Resource Governance

Energy and resource security pose as grave a threat to the UK's way of life as international terrorism, according to the views of the country's opinion-formers. Only instability in international financial markets causes greater concern. Moreover, opinion-formers put the continued supply of oil, gas, food and water as the top priority for UK foreign policy.

Among the public, ensuring the continued supply of vital resources is ranked as the second priority, largely cutting across party, age and regional lines. Interruptions to energy supply – in effect, a supply-side shut off – are viewed the second greatest threat to the UK. Long-term scarcity of essential natural resources is ranked at the same level as nuclear proliferation.

Even though the UK has suffered no physical supply shortages during the period covered by the survey, it has experienced significant increases in energy and food prices. Widely reported stories such as the 2008–09 shut-off of Russian gas to Ukraine, this year's Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan and the 2008 and 2011 energy and food price spikes may have sharpened public perceptions around natural-resource tensions, energy security and food security.

Although opinion-formers and the public identify resource and energy issues as central challenges for the UK, their analysis of the underlying drivers and how problems might arise varies widely. There is no consensus on the policy measures needed to ensure sufficient availability of natural resources and energy for the UK. While some may regard international trade frameworks and climate change mitigation as essential, others may see domestic policy frameworks and the use of military assets as preferred means of securing future access to natural resources.

Crafting responses to natural disasters

Felix Preston

Research Fellow, Energy, Environment and Resource Governance

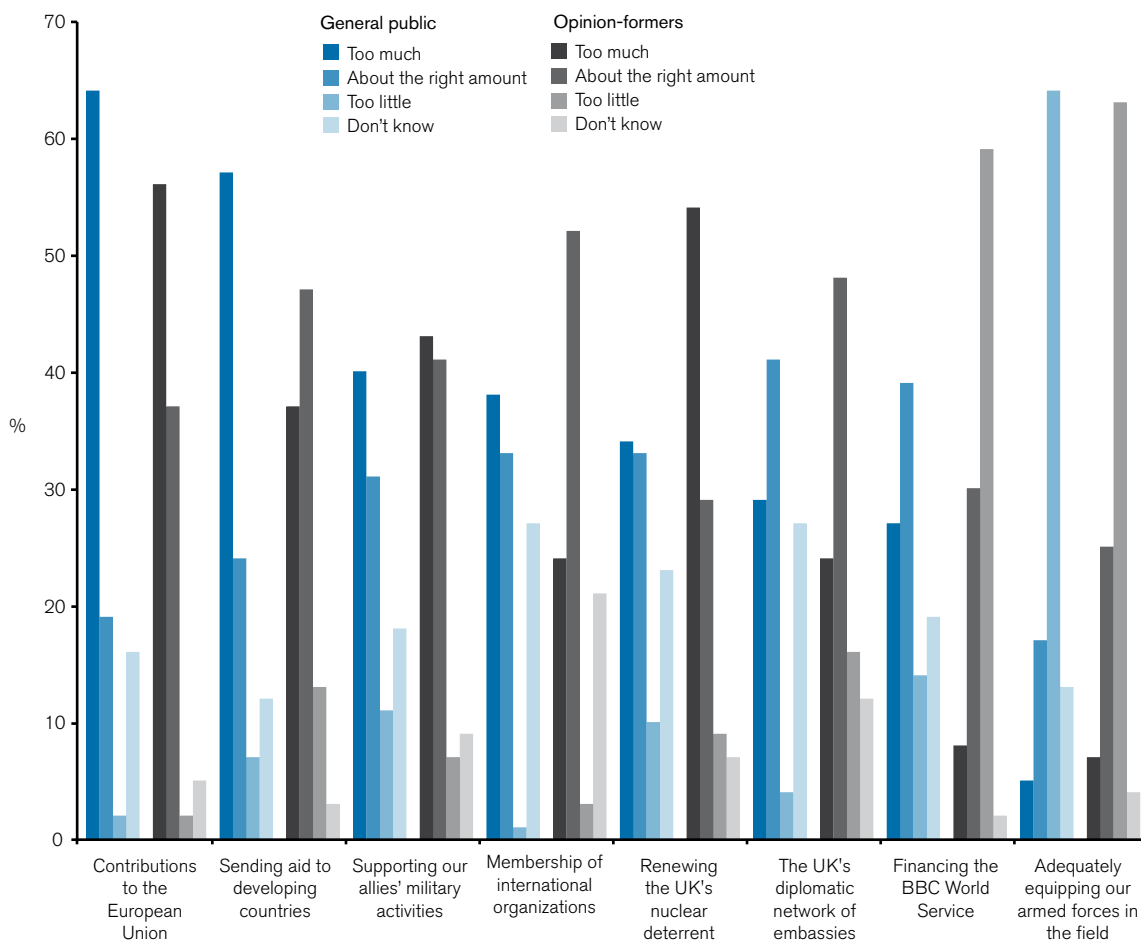
In contrast to resource security, natural disasters such as flooding, hurricanes and ash clouds barely register concern. This is perhaps surprising given the scale of human and economic consequences from recent disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 earthquake in Pakistan, the 2011 tsunami in Japan and the ongoing drought in eastern Africa. Despite annual flood events and ash cloud-related disruptions in 2010 and 2011, the UK clearly sees major natural disasters as a relatively low risk.

The interconnectedness of the global economy means that in reality no country is insulated from these low-probability, high-impact events. Many of the direct impacts of longer-term trends, such as climate change and the pressures from growing demand for food, land and fuels, will be felt through shocks rather than gradual change. Manufacturers across the world were forced to halt or slow production as inventories of essential products – electronic components, car parts and fine chemicals – were quickly run down as a result of the tsunami in Japan. The 2010 heatwave in Russia led the government to restrict wheat exports, causing prices of flour to surge in Egypt, a contributing factor to the Arab uprisings. Given the UK's openness to trade and its range of international interests, natural disasters elsewhere in the world should be seen as a direct threat to the country's interests. The public's lack of concern about natural disasters is inconsistent with its prioritization of resource security; and government strategies to ensure secure access to resources should include worst-case scenario planning.

5 Building on the UK's strengths and extending its influence in a 'networked world'

William Hague has stressed the importance that the government attaches to the need 'to strengthen the international frameworks which can turn rhetoric on human rights into accountability and lasting change'.¹⁰ The government has emphasized the need to uphold international law, reinforce international treaties on human rights, and reform institutions to tackle new challenges such as climate change.¹¹ It has noted the strengths that the UK can bring to this objective by using the 'soft power' appeal of British culture, language, education and domestic institutions such as the British Council and BBC World Service, as well as the UK's position in relevant institutions including the UN Security Council and the Commonwealth. How were these objectives viewed in this survey and what national assets did the public and opinion-formers value most in achieving them?

Figure 16: Do you think the UK government currently spends too much, the right amount, or too little on the following aspects of the UK's international policy?

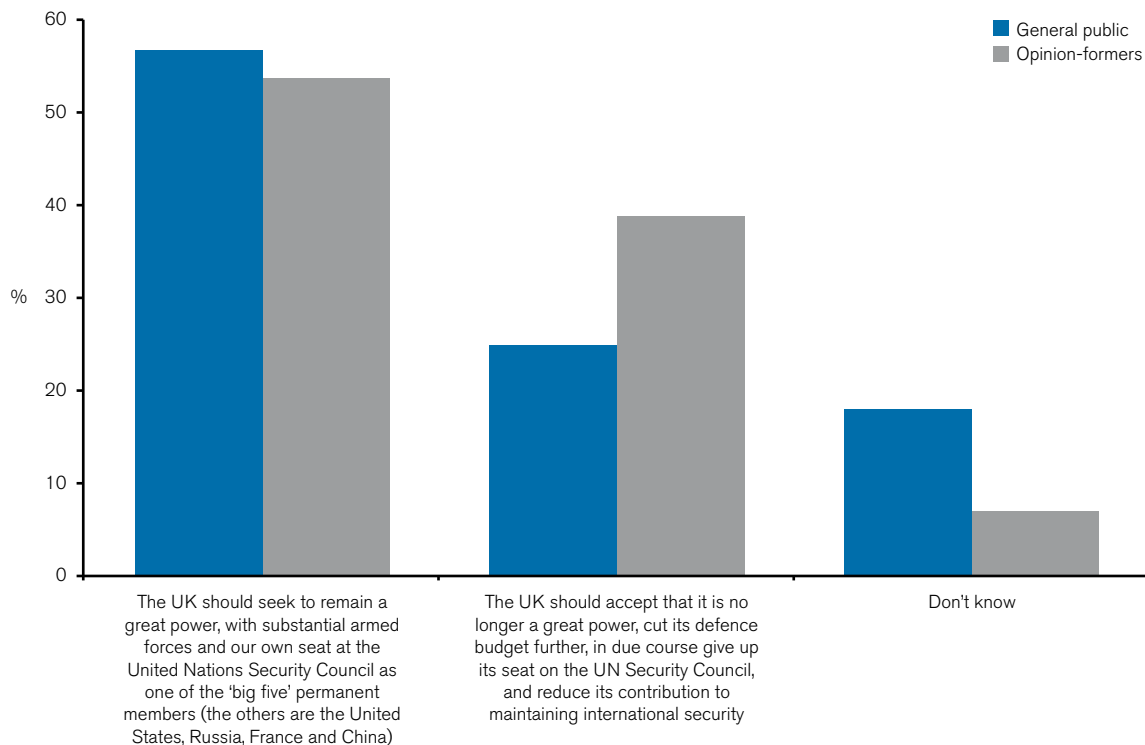


10 Hague, 'Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World'.

11 William Hague, 'Britain's Values in a Networked World', speech at Lincoln's Inn, London, 15 September 2010.

- As a starting point, a clear majority of both the public (57%) and the opinion-formers (54%) believed – as they did in 2010 – that the UK should continue to be a great power, maintaining substantial armed forces and its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. They also rejected the notion that the UK should reduce its contribution to maintaining international security (see Figure 17).
- While there was a fall in this figure from last year – perhaps a reflection of the greater domestic focus in a time of austerity – there is still a strong majority in favour of seeking to remain a great power, which was shared by the opinion-formers, providing a strong potential platform for UK engagement internationally.

Figure 17: Attitudes on the UK's international role



- For the general public, the armed forces (53%) the intelligence services (41%) and the BBC World Service (40%) were regarded as serving the UK's international interests the most. Next came the country's diplomats at 27% (see Figure 18).¹²
- By contrast, for the opinion-formers, by far the largest proportion of respondents (74%) felt that the BBC World Service was the most important factor, with the armed forces a distant second (42%), followed by British diplomats in the UK's Embassies and High Commissions. In a corresponding question, 59% of the opinion-formers thought that the government spent too little on financing the BBC World Service.
- Both the opinion-formers and the public ranked 'English as a global language of business and diplomacy' as the most important factor to the UK's international reputation (this view was particularly strongly held among the opinion-formers, at 67%; the public figure was 48% – see Figure 19).¹³
- On reputation, the survey also gave high scores for 'UK academic institutions, innovation and research' (ranked in second place for the public at 33%; and in fourth place for the opinion-formers at 39%) and for 'UK international print and broadcast media,' which the opinion-formers put in third place with 41%.

¹² These figures are based on the respondents selecting up to three items.

¹³ These figures are based on the respondents selecting up to three items.

Figure 18: Which two or three of the following do you think most serve Britain’s national interests around the world? (Respondents could select up to three choices)

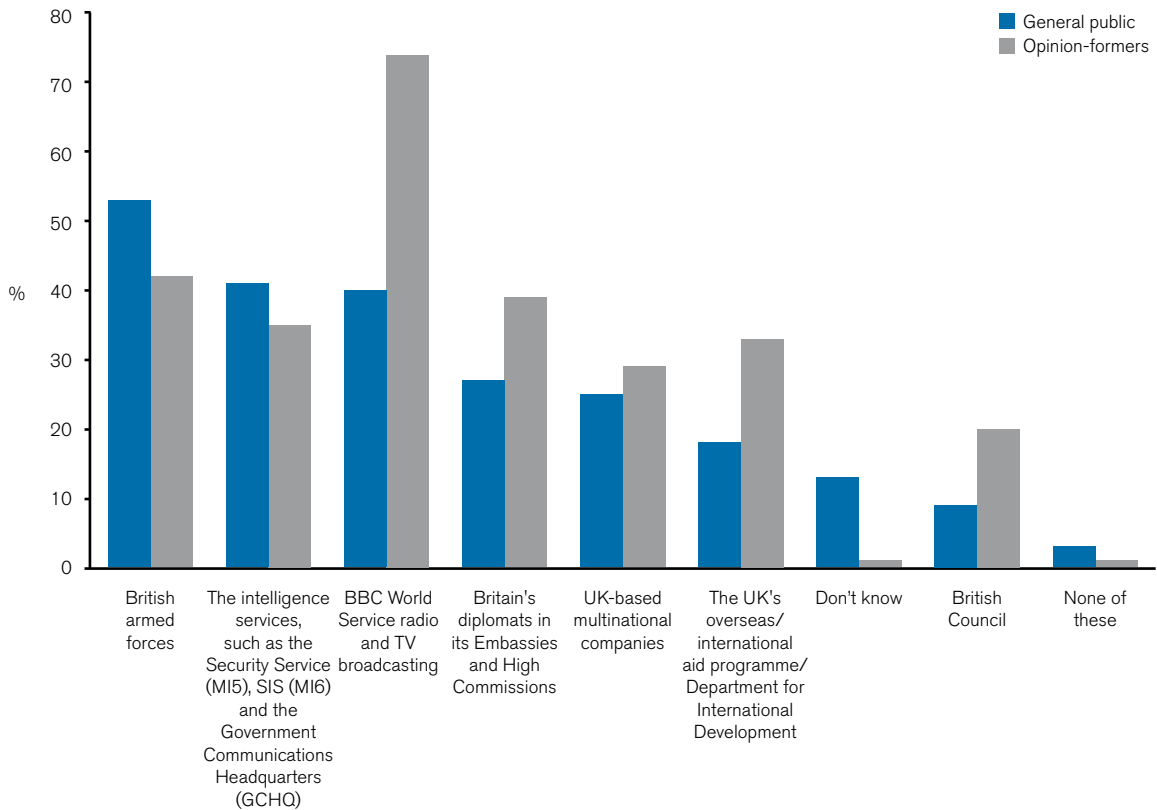


Figure 19: Which, if any, of the following do you think are the most important factors behind Britain’s international reputation? (Respondents could select up to three choices)

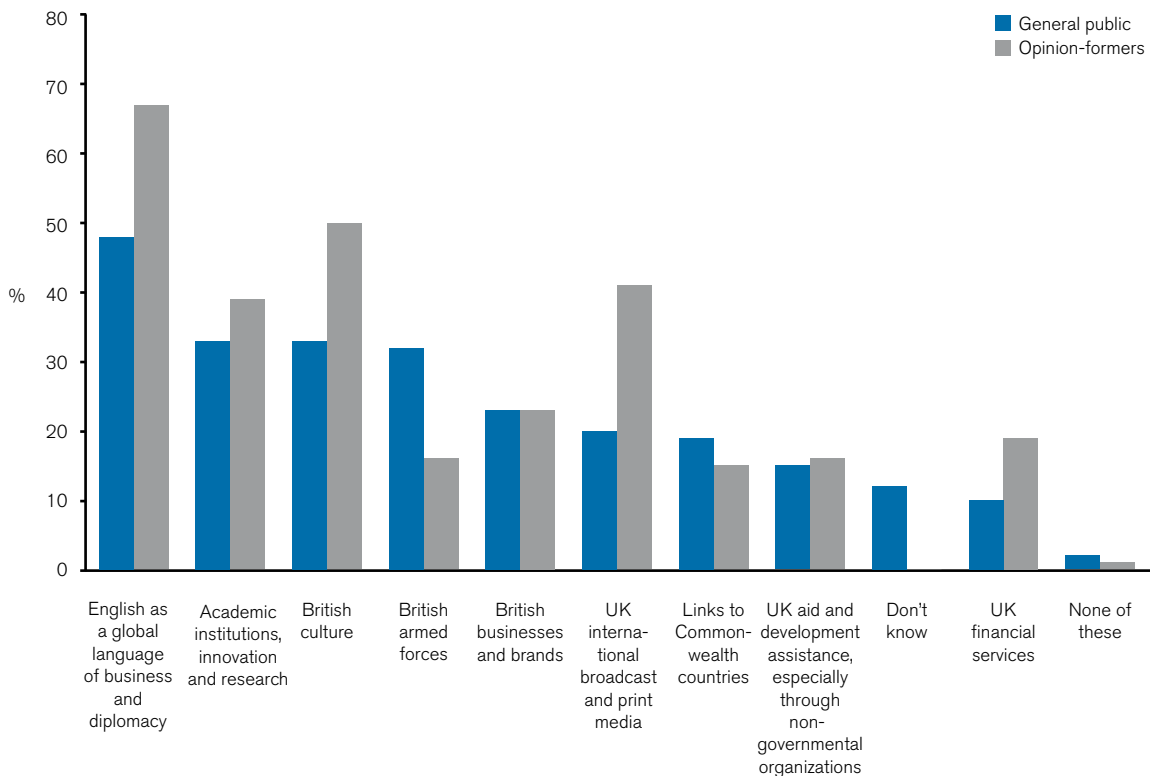
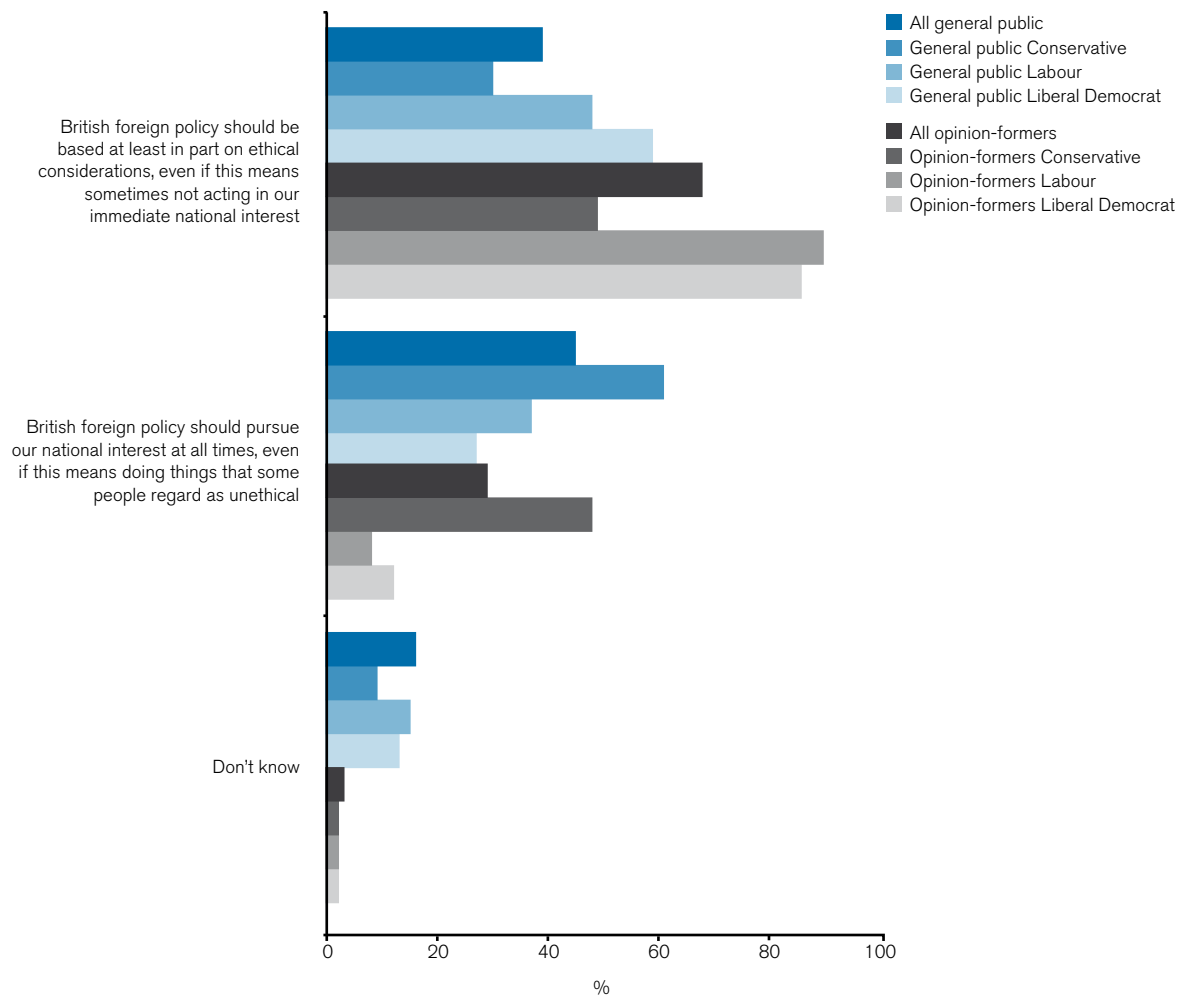
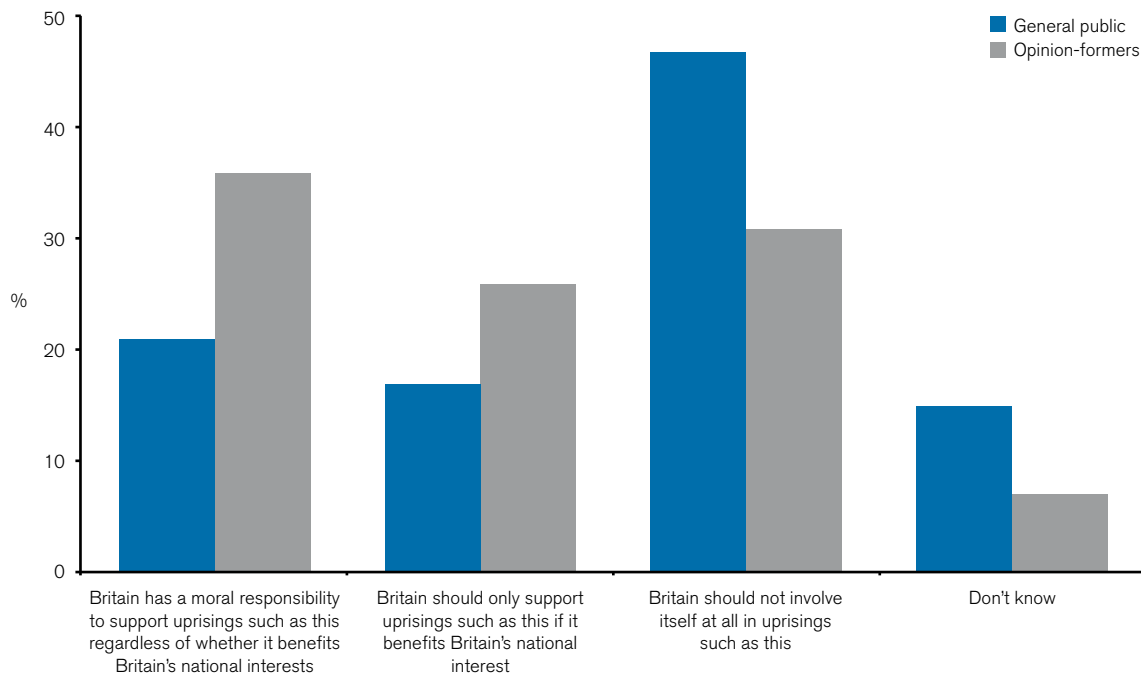


Figure 20: Attitudes on ethical considerations in UK foreign policy



- However, there was a significant divergence between the public and opinion-formers as to how far ethical considerations should inform British foreign policy. The overwhelming majority of the opinion-formers (68%) believed that ethical considerations should be a factor in making foreign policy even if this meant not acting in the country's immediate national interest (see Figure 20). But only 39% of the public respondents shared this view (even if this was a modest increase from 35% in 2010); 45% responded that British foreign policy should pursue the national interest at all times, even if this meant acting in a way that some regarded as unethical (although this was down from 51% last year).
- The hard-nosed view appeared to dominate both sets of responses concerning the Arab uprisings (see Figure 21). Only 21% of the public and 36% of the opinion-formers believed that Britain had a moral responsibility to support the uprisings regardless of whether they benefited Britain's national interests; while 47% of the public and 31% of the opinion-formers said Britain should not involve itself in uprisings of this sort, and 17% of the public and 26% of the opinion-formers said Britain should only do so if it benefited Britain's national interests.

Figure 21: Thinking about popular uprisings (such as in Libya, Egypt etc.) where citizens rise up to overthrow a dictator, which of these statements comes closest to your view?



It appears that Britons take pride in the institutions and assets that enhance the UK's reputation and believe that they are in a position to promote their interests internationally. But to what end? The idea of Britain as a great power appears to be largely an end in itself. There is little desire to promote ethical objectives among the general public, and while support for this objective is strong among the opinion-formers, support for the Arab uprisings is not. It may be that the British public is closer to a 'liberal realist' position than the coalition government, which has not only taken a lead in Libya but has also followed through on the commitment to talk tough about human rights. This stance has also been applied to emerging powers such as China whose contribution to the UK's commercial diplomacy will be vital.

Arab Spring: where next for UK policy?

Jane Kinninmont

Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme

The contentious entanglements in Iraq and Afghanistan still appear to be shaping British attitudes towards international intervention in the Middle East and elsewhere. The survey results show a striking scepticism among the general public and opinion-formers about British military intervention abroad, despite the cross-party support among politicians for the no-fly zone in Libya. The multilateral nature of the action against Colonel Gaddafi probably helped to sell it to the public: respondents were far more likely to support military action under a multilateral umbrella than in partnership with the EU, which came out as roughly as unpopular as the US. However, this was a general question with no specific target mentioned. When asked if they would support military action against Iran's nuclear programme, nearly half of the general public were opposed and opponents outweighed supporters across class, age, gender and region. There also seemed to be scepticism about intervention more widely, with nearly half of all respondents saying Britain should not involve itself in any way in uprisings like those in Egypt and Libya.

However, 18–24-year-olds bucked the trend, with 29% saying that Britain has a moral responsibility to support such uprisings regardless of national interest. Respondents in this age group were between 10 and 16 years old when the Iraq war started and between 4 and 10 years old when Tony Blair came into office, so it is likely that their worldview is less affected by the Iraq experience. They are also the same age as the people leading the uprisings in the Arab world, a region where most of the population is under 25.

By contrast, the over-60s were the most likely to oppose involvement in Arab uprisings (60%), and the least likely to support unilateral military action (12%). Further research could perhaps unlock which types of non-military intervention – such as economic sanctions or trade incentives, diplomatic pressure, civil society work – might have popular support.

Survey respondents showed continued concern about international terrorism, cited by more than half as one of the greatest threats to the British way of life. It was the most commonly cited threat among all age groups, the second being the risk to energy supplies. These popular worries may encourage policy-makers to maintain a focus on traditional concerns of counter-terrorism and energy security in dealing with the Middle East. Tackling terrorism requires a holistic approach that also addresses political issues, including conflict and state failure, not just the security aspects. But if voters want their government to support democracy and human rights overseas, they need to convince policy-makers that these things matter to them.

6 Three expert analyses

One year on, can the UK do more with less?

Lord Malloch-Brown

Chairman of EMEA, FTI Consulting; former Minister of State at the FCO and UN Deputy Secretary-General

The survey reveals fascinating splits in British attitudes to foreign policy and its instruments. The obvious split is between opinion-formers and the general public but an equally interesting difference is between Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters.

First, on the opinion-former–general public split, it is not surprising that the opinion-formers have a much more benign view of, for example, British foreign aid (ODA), and of the EU, than public opinion at large. Government communications seem to have taken this into account (perhaps ministers studied last year's Chatham House survey that highlighted the same point), limiting themselves to generally muted announcements around both issues, more intended to avoid provoking the tabloids and their readers than to converting them.

So this very significant survey of UK foreign policy lives in the shadows, only seeing the light of day when there is incontrovertibly good news such as UK non-participation in the latest Greek bailout, or British sponsorship of the replenishment of the Child Vaccination Fund, or very bad news such as the present East African drought when only the most hard-hearted voter might want to hold back help. But when the issues rub up against a visceral public dislike, such as aid to Pakistan, which is not surveyed but one can guess would not be supported by the British public, or the EU budget, stealth rather than showbiz is sensibly, it seems, the order of the day.

Yet such selective modesty does not augur well for overcoming the differences within the coalition. It seems the splits between the Conservatives and their Liberal Democrat partners are as wide on foreign policy as on domestic policy. The Liberal Democrats remain much closer to Labour in their generally progressive multilateralist instincts; fonder than their partners in government are of institutions such as the EU, particularly, but also of the UN and other parts of the multilateralist machinery.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the Conservatives as holding some naturist backwoodsman view of foreign policy. In the survey, a clear and perfectly sensible Conservative view emerges of a faith in the harder tools of foreign policy, such as NATO and the G20 (both of which Liberal Democrats also support), and defence spending, rather than the softer consensus-building roots that their rivals hold dear.

This could be the bones of a pragmatic and 'realist' foreign policy. And indeed, the government's early espousal of trade, meaning British jobs and exports, as the leading edge of its foreign policy chimes with a view of the public at large that while the relationship with the US is correctly calibrated, Britain should be doing a lot more to charm, and win over, China, India and other emerging economies. Those surveyed understand that these countries are Britain's future markets. Respondents were sharply split on party lines as to whether we were doing too little or too much with Europe.

As David Cameron and William Hague made a lot of just this approach at the start, with prime ministerial-led trade missions to India and China, and UK ambassadors being re-tooled as UK plc sales representatives, they might have hoped for endorsement from this survey, which asked voters whether they believed British foreign policy over the past year had made the country safer or more at risk. But not so; British international interests were deemed by a majority to have been set back, not advanced, by the first year of this government.

There seem to be two explanations for this. The first is the government's own reversal of its initial break with the Gladstonian foreign policy of its predecessor by leading the Libyan intervention. While the survey question was about liberal interventionism in general, the sharply negative response suggests that Britons still sensibly feel a strong antipathy towards open-ended adventures of the kind begun under Tony Blair, but which have now continued, to everybody's surprise (including, probably, his own) under David Cameron.

Once again, although the blood had rushed to the prime ministerial and public head when there seemed to be widespread risk to innocent civilian lives in Benghazi, when calmer reason returned, the government was seen as having dug itself too deep into the Libyan sands. If it had stuck to the business of China and India, or if it had respected the limited humanitarian nature of the UN Security Council resolution, then the government's foreign policy stock today would be higher.

There is, however, a second, notably sharp, division between the Conservative-led government and its own supporters and how this relates to defence spending. Conservative voters think the UK's security requires more such spending, and of course the government has bravely cut spending via its Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) to conform to reduced spending across all of Whitehall, apart from DFID.

The consequences of cuts have been an embarrassing display as the generals have struggled to mount an adequate British contribution to the NATO Libyan operation. The tally of planes and ships going from service over Libya to the scrapyard is about as humiliating as it gets for a political party part of whose historical mantra is strong defence.

Yet the government, like Republicans in the United States, has to face up to the contradiction between reining in public spending and retaining high levels of defence spending. When GDP is flat or shrinking, the sums no longer work. And of course it is inconsistent with another mantra: lower taxes.

Cameron and his team have boldly confronted this, even if it was impolitic to expose the consequences of the cuts as they have been forced to do over Libya. And hence the real challenge of British foreign policy: the need to do more with less. In the survey many still hanker for a role Britain is no longer equipped to play.

We are destined to pursue a multilateral foreign policy – carried out through instruments such as the EU, UN and NATO – because we can no longer afford a bilateral one. This survey shows how we are being nudged by circumstances in that multilateral direction. I am not sure from the numbers that we are yet ready, beyond Labour and Lib Dem opinion-formers, to embrace that future. We will reluctantly find we have no choice – but with a Euro crisis, a weakened UN and a NATO run by desk-bound generals many Britons will, I suspect, walk into that future holding their noses!

Are the British prepared to compete?

Sir Jeremy Greenstock

Chairman, Gatehouse Advisory Partners; former UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations

The first impression from YouGov's latest study of British reactions towards the UK's international priorities is of people's continuing attachment to the UK's independence as an island state. This, however, is accompanied by a lack of enthusiasm for any particular role for the UK in the international context, except perhaps contented passivity. The survey did not cover complex economic matters in detail, which obscures the fact that a nation's economic capability has become, in a more equal and competitive world, the most important determinant of national health and impact. But it is noticeable that the three most highly ranked points of focus chosen for UK foreign policy – placed in a slightly different order by the general public and the opinion-formers – are (i) ensuring the supply of raw materials, (ii) protecting the country's home territory and (iii) promoting UK business. No swelling of concern about global issues is visible here, as the scores for climate change, poverty reduction and the promotion of democratic values follow some way behind.

The second impression is the growing trend of scepticism about the European Union, most marked among those with Conservative leanings, of course, but still striking across the board. This is predictable as a response to commentaries and headlines at home, and to the EU's, and especially the Eurozone's, poor performance. But it also underlines the reluctance of the British public to acknowledge the significance of the UK's main trading bloc, or to recognize that most European societies have swung back closer to the UK's kind of national preference and can therefore promise more opportunities for partnership on issues than Britons give them credit for.

If the EU scores lowest on the relationship meter, China is out there at the top, way ahead of Russia, Brazil, the US or India. Although the survey gives little direct evidence of the reasons for this, it must surely reflect, first, the perceived prominence of China as the primary rising power and, second, the importance of China as the economic game-changer. What assets might be put into UK–China links, or who the UK's allies and partners might be in tapping the opportunities of the new era, are factors that do not emerge with any clarity from the relative coolness in the results towards the British business community, diplomacy and investment in the international institutions.

Are there areas of positive spirit? The armed forces receive a lot of support, at least for spending on their equipment, and the quality of the BBC World Service is recognized. The intelligence services, too, will be pleased to see that they feature at the higher end, which may reflect their decision to be less shadowy with their public profile. But the overall impression is that most people are content with current levels of activity and spending. And, while the armed forces receive a thumbs-up, using them to intervene abroad, as in Libya, does not. That touch of insularity, which is not so distant from the prevailing European view, reflects the experience of the past ten years, and especially the legacy of Iraq.

You could go so far as to say that the picture has a whiff of complacency about it: 'we are comfortable where we are, thank you'. Most opinion-formers – 54% (and specifically 67% among those who intend to vote Conservative) – want Britain to try to remain a great power, retain its Security Council seat and maintain substantial armed forces. But there is little sign that they want to make sacrifices for that to be possible in a more competitive world.

So it comes as a slight shock to see that the overall view of UK foreign policy over the past year of the coalition government comes out negative, with 40% thinking that it has 'damaged Britain's reputation abroad' and only 6% saying that it has enhanced it. It might reflect economic pessimism at home, or anxiety about geopolitical change, or dissatisfaction with the UK's impact on the international scene, or a complex mixture. But it does seem inconsistent with the tenor of the figures elsewhere.

Both the pollsters and the surveyed might reflect a bit further on what this exercise does not tell us. The current economic situation is the UK's greatest medium-term concern, with consequences not just for the UK's position and image in the world but for the domestic social and political story as well. Nothing is more important than getting back to top economic form.

Beyond that, there is a sense of the conventional and the familiar about these survey results which misses some cardinal points about what is going on out there. The international institutions are fading in their effectiveness and we must start thinking about what takes their place (the G20 on its own is not enough); issues are being addressed in ad hoc ways by the powers with proactive capabilities, which requires skilful and sometimes unconventional approaches by those who think of themselves in that category; the private sector and civil society are part of the multiplicity of actors on the international scene and the UK's effectiveness needs to be boosted here too; and governments are being pushed into new forms of response by the power of freer societies interacting across borders in constantly changing ways.

Sitting in our comfort area, waiting for things to get better around us, blaming the government: none of these fit what we are facing as a country. New ideas and new energy have got to come from somewhere. Time for the next generation to step forward?

Summary of key insights

Peter Kellner

President, YouGov

US President Lyndon Johnson once advised, ‘Hug your friends tight, but your enemies tighter.’ It overstates things to call China and Russia enemies these days, but millions of Britain’s voters broadly wish to follow Johnson’s advice.

YouGov’s latest annual survey for Chatham House finds there is a widespread view that the past year has dented Britain’s reputation abroad, that we are doing and spending too much on Europe, overseas aid and other things that voters do not think enhance Britain’s security and wellbeing, and that the time has come to reset our foreign policy priorities. These emphatically include our relations with China and Russia.

When people are given a list of 19 non-European countries and asked which they have strong feelings about, China does not score well: just 4% regard it favourably. And when people are shown a list of 14 European countries, only 2% pick Russia as a country they view favourably.

Yet when YouGov asked about Britain’s diplomatic ties to eight nations, plus the European Union, China and Russia top the list of countries to which we should get closer. In every case, the largest number said our ties should remain at about the current level; but among the rest, the view that we should seek a stronger relationship was most widely held in the case of China (stronger, 34%; weaker 10%), followed by Russia (stronger 20%, weaker 11%).

On balance, Indonesia and Turkey have negative ratings; but the runaway winner of the diplomatic wooden spoon is the European Union: 15% think we should have stronger ties, while as many as 35% want weaker ties.

That said, on individual European countries, our latest survey finds much the same pattern as last year. The five countries with the highest favourability ratings are all in central or northern Europe: the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and Germany. The next six are all in western or southern Europe: Ireland, Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and Greece. The three least favoured countries are all further east: Turkey, Poland and Russia.

There is little sign that domestic economic crises in Greece, Portugal and Ireland have caused their national reputations to worsen in the past year. Indeed, the proportion feeling favourable towards Ireland is up from 12% twelve months ago to 18% today – perhaps a sign of a lingering glow from the recent visits of the Queen and President Obama.

Nevertheless, when it comes to specific issues, clear majorities continue to want Britain to work more closely ‘with the rest of the European Union’. In fact, on most issues, the figures are broadly the same as or higher than those for working more closely with the US. So how do we explain the divergence in views on whether we should have stronger or weaker ties? The likely answer is that the EU is widely seen to threaten British sovereignty and independence, while the US is not.

However, these figures pose an awkward challenge for any British government seeking public approval of its European strategy – how can it achieve the practical benefits of closer cooperation without risking the charge that it is ‘giving in’ to Brussels?

7 Conclusions – leading or following public opinion?

As with many surveys, the contradictions in the Chatham House-YouGov Survey 2011 are sometimes more striking than the consistencies.

- Both the public and opinion-formers rate the promotion of British business and trade overseas as a top priority, but they are suspicious of many of the countries with which the government and business have to work to make this possible.
- All respondents strongly support Britain's armed forces and spending more on equipping them, but they place a low priority on the threats that the armed forces are best designed to fight.
- The public, in particular, remains highly sceptical about the value of the EU as an institution, but believes by a large margin that the government needs to work closely with the EU to confront Britain's most pressing external challenges.
- The survey points to a public that questions the government's agenda of promoting British values internationally, but that is proud of the institutions and assets that make the UK capable of doing so.

Do these contradictions matter? Should governments ignore public opinion on foreign policy, rather than following it or trying to shape it? After all, the government can take heart from the fact that British opinion-formers appear to be somewhat more aligned with the themes of its 'distinctive' foreign policy than the general public, whether on the values agenda, the importance of development spending, or agreement on the greatest threats to the country. Opinion-formers, moreover, who can often bring expertise or direct knowledge to bear on such matters, tend to occupy themselves with and be more vocal on international affairs.

Most governments feel that they have greater freedom of manoeuvre on foreign policy than on domestic issues. However, the fact is that public opinion can be an important consideration for a country's foreign policy, even if external concerns rarely rank as highly as domestic ones for most citizens. First, when economic resources are limited, public pressure can lead governments to cut spending on international assets that do not appear to have sufficient electoral value in the near term, though they may well be vital for a country's long-term interests. Second, international issues now impinge upon domestic politics with ever greater frequency and strength. If politicians cannot draw on a reservoir of public awareness of these interconnections, then they will face strong headwinds in pushing through the sometimes difficult choices that inevitably arise in international affairs.

Looking forward, the coalition is likely to make some adjustments to its foreign policy in response to recent events and after assessing what has and has not worked following a year in office. Although this survey can only provide a snapshot of public opinion, it does offer some insights on how any adjustment in the government's approach might be built on a stronger foundation of popular support.

The key will be to set to one side the contradictions visible in this survey and focus instead on drawing more explicit linkages between areas where public opinion can reinforce the government's foreign policy agenda. For example, the coalition should use the high levels of public support across all parties for the UK to work closely with the EU on international challenges in order to promote a more credible commercial diplomacy. The government will find it hard to open a full spectrum of economic opportunities for British businesses in markets as large as China, India and Brazil without the support that coordinated action at the EU level can provide, particularly in negotiating the lifting of domestic restrictions for entry into those markets.

In addition, as Rob Bailey has argued above, the government might have more success in building support for increases in development spending if it were able to highlight better the ways in which this

spending is linked to high-priority concerns for the public at large. The connections between UK security, on the one hand, and chronic poverty, human insecurity and weak governments in the developing world, on the other, may not resonate much with the public. But development spending can also help lessen the pressures on migration into the UK and Europe, the risk of interruptions to imports of vital resources, and the spread of organized crime, all of which were ranked among the highest threats to UK security in the survey. This is an argument that the coalition could deploy more effectively.

And, although British public opinion showed relatively low 'favourability' ratings towards countries that will play an increasingly important role in the UK's future prosperity and security, the public appears willing to support stronger diplomatic ties with those at the vanguard, such as China, India and Russia. This support, combined with an apparent public pragmatism concerning the ethical dimensions of UK foreign policy, suggests that Britons are likely to support the government's efforts to pursue closer bilateral ties with the world's emerging economies.

Given the profound economic, social and geopolitical changes currently transforming the world, the coalition has judged that the UK needs a foreign policy that differs in important respects from that of its predecessors. Undertaking structural shifts in UK foreign policy at a time of deepening economic austerity, however, requires paying greater attention than usual to public attitudes to international affairs. This survey shows that public perceptions of the international risks and opportunities facing the country do not always tally with the government's priorities. But it also reveals public attitudes on which the government may be able to draw upon in bolstering support for its foreign policy goals. Above all, the government needs to invest more time and effort in explaining the complex interconnections between the world beyond Britain's shores and the domestic welfare of its citizens.

Appendix

Survey specifics

YouGov, on behalf of Chatham House, conducted two surveys. The first was of a representative sample of 2,023 adults. This fieldwork was undertaken between 20 and 22 June 2011. The survey was carried out online and the figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18 and over).

The second survey was conducted using the YouGovStone panel and surveyed 834 panellists on YouGovStone's panel of influential adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17 and 23 June 2011. The survey was carried out online.

YouGovStone

YouGovStone is a specialized opinion research company, a joint venture between YouGov plc and Carole Stone. YouGovStone has created a network of over 4,000 opinion leaders drawn from the worlds of business, media, politics, academia, science and the arts. These 'influentials' respond to regular surveys on topics of public interest, providing detailed insights to YouGovStone clients into what opinion leaders think about key issues of the day.

YouGov survey methods

Most of the surveys conducted by YouGov are sent to a nationally representative sample of British adults selected from YouGov's online panel. For this, YouGov draws a sub-sample of the panel that is representative of the GB electorate by age, gender, social class, political party identification, region and type of newspaper (upmarket, mid-market, red-top, no newspaper), and invites this sub-sample to complete a survey. Once the sample has been identified, YouGov's in-house software sends out email invitations for a survey. Respondents are never told what the survey will be about prior to clicking the link and this aims to prevent respondents only taking surveys on topics in which they have an interest. Only respondents invited to the survey may take part in it and once they follow the link to the webpage, they are taken to a survey and may complete this only once.

Almost all surveys involve statistical weighting, whether they are conducted online, face-to-face or by telephone. This is a fine-tuning measure to ensure that the published results properly reflect the population they seek to measure. At YouGov, the targets for the weighted data are derived from three sources:

1. Census data;
2. National Readership survey (a random probability survey comprising 34,000 random face-to-face interviews conducted annually);
3. YouGov estimates on party identity. These are derived from an analysis of more than 80,000 responses to YouGov surveys at, or shortly after, the May 2010 general election, when respondents were asked both i) whether they generally thought of themselves as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat etc. (party identity); and ii) which party they would support, or had supported, in the 2010 general election. Data are weighted to May 2010 party identity wherever this information is available. The weights used for party identity are consistent with the outcome of the 2010 general election.

Given the debate surrounding the online approach to research, YouGov recognizes the need to ensure communities that are digitally excluded (e.g. the elderly) are represented in each project. YouGov has established an online research panel of over 350,000 adults living in the UK, from which samples can be easily drawn to cover almost all requirements. YouGov expends much of its recruitment resource concentrating on areas traditionally 'hard to reach' online. A large number of people on the panel are economically inactive, of C2DE socio-economic status or over retirement age, for example. Respondents can join the panel by either signing up directly on the website, being referred by a friend or family member, receiving an email invitation from YouGov, or responding to advertisements on the web. YouGov targets its email invitation to the specific needs of the panel. In a similar fashion, YouGov creates advertisements on the web which are targeted to appeal to and only appear to certain demographic groups.



CHATHAM HOUSE

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

Charity Registration Number: 208223