
The UK and Africa in the International System: Priorities and Engagement Post-Brexit

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Introduction

The following is the transcript of a keynote address made by Tobias Elwood MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister for the Middle East and Africa, at a conference entitled ‘The UK and Africa in the International System: Priorities and Engagement Post-Brexit’ on 20 April 2017.

This event brought together academics, business representatives, diplomats and government representatives, relevant stakeholders from across Whitehall departments and other experts to discuss what the UK’s vision and strategy for its post-Brexit Africa engagement should be, and what further research is needed to support policy-makers and to generate a broader understanding of challenges ahead.

This event was held in partnership with the University of Leeds and was being supported by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Tobias Ellwood MP

Thank you to Chatham House and to Alex Vines for inviting me to speak today.

The first question I often receive when travelling is what is the consequence of Britain leaving the European Union? I see this as an opportunity. It has given Britain and our government impetus to provide the connections, to build relationships, to strengthen the unions that we have with existing and new friends across the world because we need to make this work.

We will strike a new relationship with Europe and I’m sure it will be a more positive one.

We are now free, without having to go through the prism of Brussels, to look at bilateral and multilateral relationships with other parts of the World as well. A great example of this is with ECOWAS and Britain doing work there.

Given that we must make this work - we must make a success of this - and that Britain has a lot to be proud of such as our defence, intelligence, financial services, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, renewable energy, creative arts and many more, we have a lot to offer. We are the best in Europe on so many accounts, we want to share this with a wider field and where better a place to start than across the wonderful continent of Africa.

Many of you will be aware that my portfolio at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has expanded. But I’m not the only Minister who travels to Africa, as FCO is not the only outward facing department that is striking these relationships: The Department for International Development - I travel with my colleague James Wharton MP to bring the benefits of our two departments to the countries we visit; The Department for International Trade – for example, it would be looking at the UK’s relationship with ECOWAS in the future once Article 50 is struck; The Ministry of Defence – who strengthen defence relationships and assist with mutual security in Africa.

So I’m part of a greater team. Other departments have visited too: Therese Coffey MP from DEFRA has visited and is doing a huge amount of work on the illegal wildlife trade; The Chancellor recently visited South Africa, again to strengthen the prosperity bonds that we have between our two countries.

Britain is absolutely committed, not just through me, but across the departments in Whitehall, to make sure we are engaging with Africa across the entire continent.

It is worth stressing why Africa matters to UK. The reasons why are plain for everyone to see. Today 70% of the people in Africa are under 25 – they quite literally represent the future, and the population is growing faster than anywhere else. By 2050, a quarter of the world's population will be African. Its middle class will be the size of Europe. And all these new consumers are driving some of the world's fastest-growing economies.

By 2050 the total economy of the continent is expected to be worth \$30 trillion. This is supported in part by the continent's vast natural resources – not just its mineral wealth but also its incredible biodiversity.

Of course huge population growth brings challenges too. The World Bank calculates that African countries will need to create about 50,000 jobs every single day until 2035 just to keep pace with that growth in population. Meeting the aspirations of the young will therefore be especially crucial.

Get it wrong and we could see increasing emigration - draining African countries of their talented young people, weakening their economies and fuelling migration to the north. Worse still, if those aspirations are not met, dissatisfaction could make people more vulnerable to extremism. This would in turn fuel instability, and prolong Africa's dependency on international assistance.

On the other hand – if we get it right, Africa's rising population could be the powerful engine for growth that the continent needs to end extreme poverty and drive a prosperous future. This is the future we want to see. An end to the old cycle of aid and dependency and the beginning of a new partnership with Africa. A partnership that will bring mutual benefit.

The UK is well placed to develop this partnership. We already have strong historic links with many African countries. 18 of them are fellow members of the Commonwealth, with whom we share common values, legal frameworks, and institutions. This means we are well placed to support good governance and rule of law. Many others also feel a strong affinity to the UK, nurtured by family ties, language, football and music.

Our extensive diplomatic network which includes 36 Embassies and High Commissions, 19 British Council and 16 DFID offices across Africa - means we have the connections and the influence to promote the UK as the continent's key international partner.

We are also well placed to develop our partnership with Africa through our leading roles in the G7 and the G20, both of which have a focus on Africa this year. And through our position in the UN, which spends 70% of all business and 87% of its peacekeeping budget on Africa.

And finally, we have strong and historic trading links. We have the largest stock of investment in Africa. We are the largest European overseas investor into Sub-Saharan Africa. And according to the World Bank, the UK was the second biggest source of remittances to Sub Saharan Africa in 2015.

I think this is a strong case for the UK. So it is clear that Africa matters to the UK and the UK matters to Africa. So how do we build a modern partnership that is fit for the 21st Century?

We are focusing on three main areas: prosperity, security and migration. Of course they are all closely linked. You can't have prosperity without security, or security without prosperity. And if either are lacking, migration could be the consequence. Most importantly, young people must be part of the

solution. Because, as I said earlier, meeting their aspirations will be crucial to ensuring a stable and prosperous future for Africa.

Every year, 10 million young Africans enter the labour market. They need jobs to help them realise their ambitions. And their countries need them to be productive, to help transform their economies for the future. But we have to be frank and we have to be honest. At the moment, productivity in Africa is poor – the economic output of one billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa is lower than that of 82 million people in Germany.

For all the reasons I mentioned earlier, the UK is uniquely placed to help. We are working to boost productive investment in Africa, including by UK firms. The UK Government's Invest Africa programme will encourage at least £400 million of foreign direct investment to create 90,000 jobs over the next decade.

Transparency, accountability and good governance are vital for business to thrive. That's why the UK Government is investing nearly £400 million to support inclusive growth, tackle corruption, promote good governance and strengthen institutional capability. Our aim is to improve the business environment and boost private sector investment and trade in a way that will support development. Our efforts will be complemented by this year's G20 and EU/Africa Summits, which both have a similar focus.

Of course our departure from the EU also presents mutually beneficial opportunities to boost prosperity through increased trade. We will be building on our strong existing relationships and developing new ones – including with francophone countries.

Our second focus is security. Not just because prosperity is not sustainable without it, but also because of the appalling human cost of conflict. In some cases, conflict has turned a natural disaster into a humanitarian catastrophe. I am proud of the UK role in bringing emergency assistance to Somalia, South Sudan and northern Nigeria, part of the £5 billion of development aid that we are providing in Africa.

Of course we also focus on security in Africa because it matters to the UK. Terrorist groups and organised crime networks in Africa pose an ongoing threat to the UK and UK interests. That is why we are helping Nigerian security forces tackle the threat from Boko Haram, and why we helped to degrade Al Shabaab in Somalia. We are also deploying more than 450 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions in Somalia and South Sudan.

We are shining a light on the security threats associated with the illegal wildlife trade. I pay personal thanks to the work of HRH Prince Harry and his involvement. It not only risks wiping out whole species; its profits also feed corruption, fuel terrorism and encourage organised crime.

I was delighted that a BBC film crew helped to catch a group of chimpanzee traffickers in Cote d'Ivoire last December. I have visited Abidjan since then and checked up on the chimpanzees - I am pleased to say that Nemly Junior is doing well. But this was a one off, and is a major challenge that we face. How is it rangers can be paid off and provide animals for trafficking? How can we strengthen the work countries do to make sure that the movement of wildlife is stopped, that the rangers are empowered to be able to enforce and protect the areas they are responsible for, and that we remove the culture of wanting ivory in other parts of the world? It is not just about working in Africa; the challenge of tackling the wildlife trade is an intercontinental one that we need to support.

We're also pleased that we are doing work to encourage long term peace and stability through political progress across Africa. That is why we facilitated the first democratic transition of power in Nigeria and why we are hosting the Somalia Conference here in London next month.

We believe strongly in the need to find African solutions for African problems. That is why we are also working with key partners like Kenya and Nigeria to tackle terrorism, violent extremism and serious and organised crime. And it is why we are strengthening the capacity of the African Union to be the primary responder to African crises.

Turning to migration – it is a priority now and most likely still will be when we leave the EU in two years' time. Last year, over 180,000 irregular migrants crossed the Mediterranean from Africa. Almost half came from Eritrea, Nigeria and Sudan. At least 30% more have arrived in Italy so far this year, compared to last year.

We need to stop them from making such a dangerous journey and encourage them to stay at home and contribute to their own economy where possible. That's why we have devoted more resources to tackling the drivers of migration – by boosting prosperity and security in their home countries – as I have just described.

We are also increasing protection for those who do migrate or flee. We are conscious that the number of migrants who reach Europe is actually dwarfed by the up to 20 million refugees who are displaced but hosted in other African countries. So we are providing significant humanitarian and other assistance both for these refugees and their host countries. For example, in Ethiopia we are leading the development of a programme to support industrialisation, creating 100,000 new jobs for Ethiopians and refugees.

We are also focussed on tackling the organised crime networks that support migration flows from East and West Africa. A Regional Operations Centre will open soon in Sudan to share information with partners and break down trafficking networks.

I will finish by saying that leaving the EU gives us a great opportunity to develop a new modern and exciting partnership with Africa. Yes, we will continue to provide humanitarian support where it is needed. We are proud of our 0.7% GNI commitment to international aid.

But we also want this to be a partnership of equals. We are looking forward to our African partners, old and new alike, to create the stable and secure environments for business to flourish and for young people to fulfil their dreams. I thoroughly enjoyed exploring the continent after my portfolio expanded last year, and after this summer I will have visited one third of the countries in Africa; from the depths of the Madagascan jungle, to the bustling cities of Lagos and Johannesburg.

Because as Nelson Mandela said, "Money won't create success, but the freedom to make it will".

Thank you.