

THE UNITED NATIONS AT 70

Navigating a divided world: the UK and the UN Security Council

Report of Witness Seminar 3

Church House, London

13 January 2016



Background to the UN70 witness seminars

To mark the UN's 70th anniversary, the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants (BAFUNCS) and United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) organised three 'witness seminars' in 2015-16 to draw on the experience of British citizens who have worked for or with the UN over the past seven decades:

- The UK and the UN in Development Cooperation, at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, 13-14 May 2015;
- The UK and the UN in Humanitarian Affairs, at the Weston (Bodleian) Library, University of Oxford, 16 October 2015;
- The UK and the UN in Peace and Security Affairs, at Church House, Westminster, 13 January 2016.

Witness seminars are widely regarded as among the most useful and innovative forms of oral history, enhancing the traditional interview format through interactions between witnesses in discussion. The purpose of these seminars was to provide recommendations for UK action to increase the effectiveness of the UN, at a time when the need for the UN is more urgent but the international system is under increasing strain.

Our partners for the series were: the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex; All Souls College, Oxford; King's College London; the Bodleian Library and the Overseas Development Institute. The Department for International Development and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office provided funding for the seminars, and generous support was also received from All Souls College and the Bodleian Library.

This report is written by Alexandra Buskie, Policy and Advocacy Manager at UNA-UK.

1. Introduction

This report is based on discussions at a 'witness seminar' on the UK's role in international peace and security, which took place on 13 January 2016. Held almost to the day of the 70th anniversary of the first UN Security Council meeting – and in the same room – the seminar sought to collect testimony from current and former British professionals who have worked in or with the UN system throughout the Organisation's lifespan.

The anniversary provided an opportunity for those involved in the UN system to reflect how the Organisation has stood up to the fluid and diverse political, economic and social challenges of the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century. Specifically, the seminar considered the UK's record on the UN Security Council and the Council's activities to prevent and resolve conflict. It proceeded in four sessions designed to draw on participants' insights to provide lessons and recommendations for the future:

- Session 1: The UK on the Security Council: Assessing the Record after 70 Years;
- Session 2: Prevention and early action;
- Session 3: Peacekeeping and peacebuilding;
- Session 4: Lessons and recommendations from seven decades in international peace and security.

Organised by the United Nations Association – UK, the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants and King's College London, the seminar proceedings will serve as a record of oral history. As such, the entire seminar has been recorded and transcripts are available in the annex to this report online at <http://www.una.org.uk/content/un70-witness-seminar-series>.

Rather than repeating the transcripts, this report seeks to capture and analyse the principal themes of the discussions. It begins by considering the main hindrances faced by those working on the Security Council and how this affects the Council's – and often by extension the Secretariat's – ability to prevent and respond to conflict.

The report then moves to analyse the overall record of the UK at the Council and finds that it is a highly productive member that has worked hard to justify its permanent position. The final section considers the main concerns raised during the seminar, focusing on the UK's capacity to continue to be an assertive member of the Council in the current political climate. The report ends with recommendations drawn from the insights of the seminar's participants.

1.1 Seminar speakers list¹

- Professor Mats Berdal – Professor of Security and Development, King's College London
- Mr Sam Daws – Director, Project on UN Governance and Reform, Centre for International Studies, Oxford University
- Mr Yves Doutriaux – Former Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the UN
- Dame Glynne Evans – Former British Ambassador
- Sir Jeremy Greenstock – Chair of the United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK), former Permanent Representative to the United Nations
- Mr Tihomir Loza – Executive Director, South East European Network for Professionalization of Media
- Sir Mark Lyall Grant – National Security Adviser, Cabinet Office and former UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations
- Lord Malloch-Brown – Former United Nations Deputy Secretary-General
- Mr Edward Mortimer CMG – President of the British Association of Former United Nations Civil Servants (BAFUNCS)
- Sir Kieran Prendergast – Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General
- Mr Jonathan Prentice – Director of London Office and Senior Advocacy Adviser, International Crisis Group
- Professor Sir Adam Roberts – Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for International Studies, University of Oxford
- Ambassador Matthew Rycroft – Permanent Representative to the UK Mission to the UN
- Mr Quentin Teisseire – Political Counsellor, Embassy of France in the UK
- Dr Francesc Vendrell – Former United Nations Mediator at the Department of Political Affairs
- Dr Jennifer Welsh – United Nations Special Adviser for the Responsibility to Protect
- Mr Andrew Whitley – Policy and Advocacy Director, The Elders
- Lord Williams of Baglan – Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Chatham House
- Mr Paul Williams – Director, Multilateral Policy Directorate, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
- Professor Dominik Zaum – Research Dean for Prosperity and Resilience, University of Reading

¹ For a full list of participants, please see the annex to this report online at <http://www.una.org.uk/content/un70-witness-seminar-series>.

2. Selective security and the obstacles to an effective Security Council

Participants agreed that the UN has had a transformative impact on the world over the past seventy years. It has promoted dialogue between adversaries, provided life-saving humanitarian assistance and created a framework of international laws and treaties that form the basis of international relations. The Security Council (the Council), mandated with the primary responsibility for international peace and security, has been at the forefront of responding to international crises. However, those present conceded that its record was chequered and failures were easily identified during the discussions: Syria, Israel/Palestine, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and many more. Even its responsibility for the prevention of large-scale war between great powers is debated – some seminar participants pointed to the deterring effect of nuclear weapons as having had a greater impact in this respect.

Even so, participants maintained that the UN was an indispensable forum for managing world politics. They acknowledged the need to safeguard the UN's survival, particularly during the current period in which geopolitical trends feel less predictable than ever before. They identified a number of major challenges; multiplying crises characterised by civil war, atrocities, terrorism, and transnational and non-state actors; the strain on the humanitarian system; the shifting balance of global power as Russia reasserts its international influence and China tests the waters. Participants acknowledged that this competitive context exacerbated the UN's inherent political constraints and compromised its ability to respond effectively. And yet, they noted that the Council had more country situations and thematic issues on its agenda than ever before.

Four key obstacles to effective Council action were referenced throughout the seminar:

- states' ability to block Council activities;
- the silo-driven agenda;
- the substitution of action with analysis and discussion; and
- the resurgence of the primacy of sovereignty in the world views of some member states.

Participants worried that the failure to negotiate these constraints threatened the Council's credibility and legitimacy, undermining its ability to deliver positive outcomes to prevent, de-escalate and manage conflict.

2.1 Permanent members blocking Council activities

Successive UK Permanent Representatives present at the seminar spoke of the "stifling" environment on the Security Council. Matthew Rycroft, reflecting on his first 8 months in post, described the Council as procedural, bureaucratic and riddled with frustrations. One of the main issues he described was the ease with which states could block, rather than stimulate, agreement and action.

He reported that Russia had only brought one positive resolution during his time on the Council and argued that Russia saw its role as one aimed at limiting the Council's activities. This affected substantive resolutions on country situations, as well as activities under the heading of preventive diplomacy, such as Council visits to Burundi or Yemen. The efforts of Council members searching for solutions could be wasted by a single P5 member intent on blocking those activities.

This was an inherent political constraint in the make-up of the Council and led many participants to conclude that the UN provides a form of selective, rather than collective, security. They noted that its ability to broaden its sphere of activity had ebbed and flowed depending on the dynamics in the Council at a particular time.

This was particularly clear when considering the Council's role in conflict prevention. With the warming of P5 relations in the 1990s, the Council was able to undertake a number of successful exercises in prevention, such as the preventive deployment of peacekeepers in Macedonia and rapid intervention in East Timor (although it still failed to respond to crises such as Rwanda).

Today, its successes appeared much less frequent. Indeed, participants argued that the Council's current role is better regarded as escalation prevention rather than conflict prevention, with members garnering the political will to take action only after a situation has deteriorated, such as in Burundi or the Central African Republic. Even by this standard, they have acted inadequately, most notably in Syria.

Those who had worked in the Secretariat spoke of their frustration with this trend. Referring to his experience working for the UN Relief and Works Agency, Andrew Whitley acknowledged the "suffocating" atmosphere on the Council and lamented the lack of action to protect civilians in Gaza during his tenure. He blamed the US as the main obstacle and noted that, while there had been no agreement in the Council on this issue, it did not necessarily denote lack of behind-the-scenes effort on the UK's part.

Given the difficulties in galvanising Council action, the Secretariat often ended up taking the lead in preventive efforts. Francesc Vendrell referred to the period between 1986 and the mid-1990s as the UN's "golden era" in peacemaking, marking the end of bipolar politics but preceding today's multipolar world. While the ongoing conflict in Syria today was cited as an example of the risks of overreliance on the Council to support peace, Vendrell noted that the Secretariat often acted without its involvement. He referred to the conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, where the Secretary-General had a broad mandate to act under his Good Offices. Michael Williams noted that this worked so long as mediators had the authority to deal with all parties to the conflict, such as in Lebanon, where he was permitted to negotiate with Hezbollah.

However, participants acknowledged the Secretariat's own constraints. The character and will of each individual Secretary-General affected the potential of their Good Offices and other preventive powers. The future of the UN's leadership,

with a new Secretary-General to be selected by the end of 2016, was a key theme in the discussions. Mark Malloch Brown noted that the incumbent must be able to garner political support from the major powers and groups at the UN, while never compromising on the values of the Charter. The balance of views among participants was that a legitimately elected and morally assertive Secretary-General with a single term, perhaps of seven years, would have greater credibility and membership support, and so be more willing to take risks in calling out states for blocking action.

2.2 Siloed agendas

Participants also drew attention to the multiple issues confronting the Council and the deep silos that pervade the UN's work. They further noted that the consideration of any country included not only the political and security situation of that country and its neighbours, but also a host of thematic issues, from women, peace and security to terrorism and drug trafficking. Jennifer Welsh pointed out that one of the main difficulties for the Secretariat is not the availability of information and analysis, but the need to evaluate situations of concern holistically and to elevate them to Council level at the right time.

Participants agreed that the most constructive debates in the Council took place during briefings from outside voices and that it needed to open up the analysis of as many "siloed" issues as possible. While many recently involved with the Council's work noted that such briefings do take place, they reported that a broader cultural change had yet to happen. The overriding tendency was still for people to present the Council with restricted agendas, rather than analysing and demonstrating how their concerns and priorities for a particular country interlinked with a range of strategic considerations.

This was particularly true of the Council's role in mandating and overseeing peace operations. Recent reviews, such as the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations, and drives for contributions, like the US-led peacekeeping summit, had established avenues for improving the ways in which the UN and member states approached peace operations. However, participants felt that there was a sense of *déjà vu* regarding the detailed recommendations and the continued failure to generate the political will to put agreed arrangements into practice.

All of those presenting on the panel on peacekeeping agreed that the better integration of silo-driven issues was a crucial operational challenge for those working in peace operations. Babu Rahman pointed to the need for the Council to receive holistic feedback on the progress of a mission from diverse representatives. He cited the example of Somalia, in which it was the norm for the Council to hear from both the UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General and a representative from the African Union in the same Arria Formula meeting.

There were repeated calls throughout the seminar for better coordination between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of

Political Affairs (DPA), along with pleas to improve the integration of these departments with Special Representatives for the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinators, Heads of Mission and representatives from other relevant actors working in country. Several participants recommended the merging of the DPKO and DPA, or at the very least, improving the way they worked together so as to marry the “political brains” with the field experience. Kieran Prendergast suggested that simply moving the offices of the respective Under Secretaries-General next to each other would engender better transfer of information. He also suggested that the Secretary-General should have the power to sanction those in the Secretariat who were competing with their colleagues rather than working together.

2.3 Analysis, not action

Participants felt that the difficulty coordinating the Secretariat's various agendas, compounded with the ease with which states could block action, made it too easy for the Council to analyse a situation from multiple angles. This gave the illusion of activity by remaining “seized of the issue” rather than deciding on and authorising a course of action. As a result, the Council was less inclined to act early to prevent the escalation of a conflict, and less capable of planning ahead and agreeing on comprehensive political strategies for a situation. Some questioned whether the absence of such strategies guiding the mandates of peace operations also explained the longevity of current missions, which were experiencing neither outright failure nor success.

Participants conceded that the tension between managing current crises and planning ahead is not unique to the Council. Nonetheless, the drip of information from disparate parts of the system at different times, potentially focusing on different issues, made it difficult for the Council to see an holistic picture of a situation and feel informed enough to agree on an according strategy.

To some extent, participants felt that the practice of patching up peace operations in the short-term and the creation of “Christmas tree mandates” (that incorporate, without necessarily connecting, a range of issues) was working today. However, the criss-cross between mandates from the different parts of the UN system on the ground could confuse the overall effectiveness of a particular aim, such as the potential clash between protecting civilians from an aggressive party and including all parties to conflict in mediation. It is important to note that this debate focused mainly on the high politics of the Security Council and the Secretariat. A number of participants noted that, while the New York process was fundamental, those deployed on the ground – as political advisers, development experts or military personnel – had their own challenges in putting Council and Secretariat decisions into practice. Nevertheless, participants agreed that the Council needed to be able to plan for upcoming instability in a more sustainable way.

Quentin Teisseire argued that while the peacekeeping budget was relatively large, the recurrent use of peace operations as the first and ongoing point of call, in lieu of

preventive or political activities, meant that this money could soon run out. Member states could not assume that the peacekeeping budget would provide the means to deal with the multiplying and long-running situations of political instability into the future. Financial and troop contributors alike might become fatigued by a growing array of never-ending and complex missions.

2.4 Reassertion of state sovereignty

While the Council's activity in the 1990s and the General Assembly's 2005 agreement on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) suggested a move towards reframing state sovereignty in the context of protecting human rights, participants reported that member states were apparently back-tracking on these commitments in favour of a more traditional interpretation of state sovereignty.

Matthew Rycroft reported that today some member states reject the legitimacy of early intervention and Council-mandated action and reassert the primacy of national sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention. He pointed to Venezuela as an example, which he said rejects outright the Council's authority to trump national sovereignty; it does not support Chapter VII resolutions, sanctions or peacekeeping mandates, and argues that all of these should require the consent of the host government (at present, only the deployment of peacekeeping operations does). He expressed concern that this worldview prevented the Council from working properly and was a serious barrier to its role in maintaining international peace and security.

Kieran Prendergast pointed out that this issue is not new: within an hour of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's famous 1999 speech, the President of Algeria had issued a statement disagreeing with the idea that sovereignty needed to be reinterpreted in light of the need to protect human rights; subsequent summits of the G77 and the NAM included a rejection of the idea of humanitarian intervention; suspicion about the interventions that took place in Kosovo in 1999, Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, served to strengthen this position.

During the conflict prevention session, panellists noted that scepticism surrounding recent military interventions has spread to include prevention and early Council considerations of a country, making it difficult to argue that early engagement in preventive activities and forward planning in peace operations are legitimate. They noted that this did little for the Council's credibility, or for the development of a strong international norm of early preventive action, as envisaged by the R2P principle. While critics were often quick to blame R2P for not making a difference to Council negotiations, Jennifer Welsh stressed that the value of R2P as a political principle lay in raising the cost of inaction or vetoing action; but it could not guarantee action, which was difficult to agree on in any circumstance. The role of regional organisations in this process was identified as a double-edged sword: while they provide additional avenues to undertake prevention and foster legitimacy for a

particular activity, many remain weak and have their own agendas that can block action.

Differences in national perspective also raised questions about the strength of the Council's commitment to protecting human rights. While numerous participants testified that bringing human rights issues to the Council was now less taboo than during the Cold War, it was reported that many states are still not comfortable with the Council applying this lens to crises. Welsh noted that the Council's unwillingness to discuss human rights in a particular country can stem from a political reluctance to challenge a prevailing narrative of progress. She used the example of the 2015 elections in Burma/Myanmar, in which member states hailed the flourishing of democracy and the rule of law in the country, despite the fact over a million Rohingya were disenfranchised during the elections.

Participants noted that the legitimacy of the process for selecting who is subject to Council scrutiny was crucial for gaining the support of those suspicious of early prevention and eager to assert sovereignty against interference in human rights issues. The consensus was that the Council must be transparent in explaining the reasons for considering human rights issues in a particular country or for defining a certain actor as a "spoiler". The Human Rights Council's (HRC) Universal Periodic Review was noted as a good example of such a process, as all states undergo equal scrutiny. Participants agreed that this could help to justify early preventive activities to those reverting to Cold War interpretations of sovereignty and a number of participants called for a stronger relationship between the HRC and the Security Council.

Overall, these four obstacles are a real hindrance to effective Council action. The next section considers the UK's approach and track record of work in this difficult environment.

3. The UK at the Council

Participants overwhelmingly characterised the UK as a productive member of the P5, working hard to justify its privileged position. Matthew Rycroft reported that Britain was currently focusing on getting a more action-orientated, transparent and interactive Council. Participants almost unanimously agreed that the UK's current role on the Council was one of leadership. Britain was the penholder on a variety of countries and thematic topics, including Yemen, Libya, Darfur, Somalia, Peacekeeping, Protection of Civilians and Women, Peace and Security. They further agreed that the UK had a track record of improving the Council's working methods and breaking silos to join up activities in diverse fields. In the past it had brought issues like climate change and development to the Council. More recently, it had used its presidency to chair a meeting at the level of development ministers on peaceful societies and conflict prevention.

3.1 Sources of British influence

The UK “gets development” – several participants said this was key to Britain's status on the Council and in the wider UN system. Current and former UK Permanent Representatives argued that the majority of member states see the UN as a vehicle for development; despite its position in the UN's hierarchy, they argued that the Council's work was a subcategory of this aim. Britain's place at the forefront of development lent it the respect and trust of developing states, and influenced its role and activities on the Council. Francesc Vendrell also noted that the UK is the only P5 member that has recognised the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, and with France, is a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

More traditional hard power attributes, such as its economic and military power – particularly its capacity to dedicate both 0.7% of GNI to development and 2% of GDP to defence spending – were also identified by participants as key parts of the UK's status on the Council. However, many expressed concern that the UK's recent economic decline and relatively limited financial and military capacity signalled the waning of the UK's relative international status.

In addition, participants referred to Britain's skill in diplomacy as a key component of its capacity to operate in the complex multilateral environment at the UN. While the annual budget negotiations give diplomats the chance to take part in classic power negotiations, participants stressed that personal diplomacy is an important element of British influence. Former diplomats stressed that relationships, when leveraged with intellectual and diplomatic skill, can and do trump national competition, ease negotiations and garner votes.

Matthew Rycroft remarked that individual ambassadors could be influential well beyond the size and power of their state, playing significant roles by acting as chairs of committees or processes. Lichtenstein is one example of a member state with political weight well beyond its size, due to its leadership of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group. He reported that British ambassadors generally tried to meet with all 192 other Permanent Representatives within a year of taking office. This kind of quiet, rigorous use of diplomacy was seen as a central strength of the UK at the UN and it was argued that the UK rarely tried to take national credit for the successful outcomes this produced.

3.2 Working with others

Most felt that the UK's relationship with France on the Council strengthened its capacity to play a positive role. Yves Doutriaux argued that while the two countries have experienced deep disagreements – particularly over Iraq – they are close working partners and, between them, draft 70 per cent of the Council's resolutions. He noted that France and the UK have similar interests that go beyond narrow national concerns, while other P5 members tend to seek more unilateral goals. He also described the division of labour between the UK and France as “gentle

competition", to the extent that the two were apparently competing for the approval of the General Assembly, particularly on reform and improving working methods.

For the most part, this division of labour worked, although there were cases where an issue fell through the cracks because neither could agree on how to divide responsibility. One example of this was Boko Haram, which the UK was said to see as a French issue but on which France wanted UK leadership. The French also tend to take more of an EU-centred role, proactively looking for ways for EU initiatives and capacities to support the Council's work.

Participants maintained that the UK's industriousness on the Council is well-known but some felt that it could be beneficial to have elected members as pen holders. This would improve relations between elected and permanent members and would close the information gap between them. However, former Permanent Representatives stated that given the chance, elected members often declined the responsibility. Elected members came to the table with varying degrees of skill and capacity. Jeremy Greenstock argued that the UK should focus on helping them to prepare and adapt for their time on the Council in order to raise its potential.

3.3 UK approach to prevention and peace operations

Overall, participants felt that the UK's approach to prevention was good, although its status as a permanent Council member made some states suspicious of its intentions. It had pushed forward a number of initiatives seeking to reinforce the Council's role in prevention, including the adoption of Resolution 2171, which stressed the importance of early warning mechanisms; effective use of Chapters VI and VIII; and a more proactive role for the Secretariat. The UK introduced, and continued to encourage, the use of "horizon scanning" meetings to improve the Council's understanding of situations at risk and the flow of information between the Council and the Secretariat. It had also been a leading voice in establishing delegation missions to countries under stress, such as that to East Timor in 1999, supported by Jeremy Greenstock.

Similarly, participants noted that Britain has a progressive approach to peace operations. The UK has been at the forefront of initiatives to improve the UN's capacity to protect civilians. It has worked to include appropriate measures in peacekeeping mandates, provided guidance and training to peacekeepers and has sought to hold missions to account for their performance. The UK has also supported improved integration, arguing that this improves coherence and sustainability, reduces the risk of unintended consequences and provides better value for money.

Babu Rahman argued that the UK Government wants to see a smarter, more agile and anticipatory approach to peace operations with better levels of accountability and improved conduct in the field. Most participants felt that the recent announcement that Britain is doubling the number of its troop contributions to 600

represented a strengthening of the UK's commitment to peace operations and an acknowledgement that it is in the UK's interests to support a UN system capable of meeting the needs of contemporary conflict.

3.4 The UK's approach to reform

While the UK was not noted to be at the forefront of efforts to reform the composition of Council, it was also not the main obstacle. Such reform would require Charter amendment, which needed a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly as well as no vetoes. The UK's apparent support for Council expansion notwithstanding, this was deemed unlikely to succeed in the current climate. As such, the general attitude towards the UK's support for innovation and improvement of the Council's working methods was positive.

In particular, the UK's current leadership on improving the transparency of the selection process of the Secretary-General is an example of where it has adopted an innovative idea that betters the Council's working methods and its relationship with the wider UN membership. Its support – albeit less vocally – for the ACT code of conduct on the restraint of the veto in cases of atrocity crimes was another such example. Other, more prosaic improvements, such as the introduction of video conferencing and ensuring clear lines of sight between Permanent Representatives sitting at the Council's horse-shoe table, were also noted as part of a wider campaign to make the Council work better.

3.5 Brits at the Secretariat

Kieran Prendergast argued that British UN diplomats have long had a strong role and positive reputation at the UN Secretariat. It was stressed that the performance and political weight of British Under Secretaries-General was greater than that of their American, Russian or Chinese counterparts, because they were often seen as totally independent from Government. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the British UN diplomat, such independence could sometimes be a double-edged sword. In a written submission to the seminar, Margaret Anstee outlined the lack of support she received from the British Government during her time at UN Headquarters as Under Secretary-General and how it had affected her career progression.

4. Concerns for the future

The productivity and leadership of the UK notwithstanding, a number of concerns were raised by participants when considering the future of the UK's role on the Council.

First, that the UN is framed in the UK's stated national interests. The Government's 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review acknowledges the importance of the rules-based international order and the UN's central place in this, expressing a commitment to upholding the health of this system. There was agreement that the UK needs to support the UN to adapt and

remain relevant to the challenges faced by the international community. Participants differed as to the extent to which the Government was investing sufficiently in maintaining the health of the UN, with Jeremy Greenstock calling for deeper and more consistent engagement with the UN at political levels of Government. Most agreed that the UK could not become complacent about its approach to the Organisation.

Second, and in order to undertake these activities, the UK needed the right capacity to play this role. A number of former diplomats argued that the budget cuts at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office were a cause for deep concern at a time of growing fragmentation in geopolitics, and called into question the long-term capacity of the UK to achieve significant results from collective diplomacy.

While it was noted that the real impact of the cuts had not undermined the quality of UK diplomacy, participants argued that the UK was losing relative influence due to changes in geopolitical power. They also felt that the cuts symbolised drifting political will at the highest levels of government. Jeremy Greenstock argued that diplomacy was being undervalued in London, pointing to the comparatively high Government investment in defence and development. He stated that diplomacy was a crucial third pillar for bringing these two assets together, now being weakened by the Government's budgetary decisions.

Third, the relationship between London and the UK Mission in New York and the wider UN political framework was identified as an area of concern. The political direction of the UK at the UN needs political will, resources and policy guidance. Participants argued that for this, there must be a clear understanding across Whitehall and in Parliament about what the UN can and cannot do. Politicians need to know that the UK can be a strong and productive member of the UN when it is empowered to act. Participants argued that they themselves needed to help establish a narrative of what success on the Security Council looked like in order to build support for the UN at home. Some also felt that politicians needed to be reminded that, at base, the UN is about the development of weaker states. While the Security Council's political debates captured the headlines, they argued that there was very superficial coverage of the actual work of the UN and its work across the globe.

Successive British Permanent Representatives also stressed that politicians need to be prepared to make the concessions and effort required to enable the Council to work properly. This included the ability to finesse, or make relative judgments about, disagreements or close relations with states such as Russia or the US, in order to produce positive Council outcomes. Former diplomats stressed that politicians must understand that cooperation with adversaries or disagreement with friends was sometimes necessary for the UK to stand up for its values and interests on the Council; excluding an unpalatable but important stakeholder prevents progress on the real issues of a dispute, just as pandering to a close ally can overwrite important longer-term interests.

5. Conclusion

70 years since its establishment, the UN is facing a key moment in its development and history. Its inherent political constraints mean that it provides a system of inconsistent and selective security rather than collective and comprehensive security. Nevertheless, without its existence, the first decades of the 2000s would have looked very similar to the earlier years of the 1900s. Threatened by the fragmentation of political centres with the rise of middle powers, the Security Council no longer truly reflects the international balance of power, influence and interests. While the Council is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, the UN Charter is oriented towards nation states and real power still rests with capitals. The resurgence in the focus on state sovereignty at the cost of the protection of human rights is one channel through which states are challenging the legitimacy of the Council and the provisions and interpretations of the Charter.

As a permanent member, the UK needs to continue to invest in producing positive outcomes in the Council and supporting innovative initiatives to improve its capacity to act effectively and transparently. The UK cannot afford to be complacent in such uncertain times. It must continue to outperform every day in order to uphold the Council's credibility and legitimacy as the international body with real and continuing potential to prevent catastrophic conflict.

6. Recommendations

The UK at the Security Council

- Continue to support improvements to Council working methods that increase transparency, accountability and effectiveness;
- Continue to work towards strengthening the Council's capacity to act preventively, including by pushing for briefings from the Secretariat and for an action-orientated Council culture;
- Call out states that are reverting to outdated conceptions of sovereignty or that disregard the protection of human rights and the authority of the Council, and engage them in open debate;
- Support the closer integration of the work of DPKO and DPA;
- Consider how to help strengthen the capacity of elected Security Council members to work effectively on the Council.

The British Government

- Reconsider its investment in diplomacy and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office;
- Outline a strategy for the UN and its place in British interests;
- Improve knowledge and understanding of the UN across Whitehall, including its constraints and its importance to British national interests;

- Maintain the political independence of appointees to the Secretariat and ensure that such positions are recruited on merit;
- Continue to strengthen its engagement with UN peace operations, including its work on the Council and its contributions of civilian, military and police personnel;
- Support processes to improve the UN Secretariat's human resources policies and procedures.

British Parliamentarians

- Hold the Government to account on its commitment to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, demonstrating support for stronger investment in the UK's diplomatic capacity;
- Scrutinise the Government's approach to the UN and call for a comprehensive strategy that establishes the place of the UN in UK national interests;
- Insist on regular briefings about the UK's work on the Security Council, particularly with regard to improving working methods and strengthening its preventive capacity.