

Lord Howell of Guildford Keynote address

Commonwealth Symposium

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(Extract)

If the new Johnson administration wants to be really radical, and prepare the UK really well for difficult new world conditions, it should merge the whole DFID apparatus, with its vast budget, with the FCO.

Think of it, we would then have a spearhead in promoting our influence and interests not run on a shoestring but on a £15-16 billion budget. reaching out to every corner of the earth. Old-fashioned attitudes towards so-called (and nowadays misnamed) developing countries (a term which many of them deeply resent anyway) could be drained out of our overseas policies, and new partnerships built round the world.

I have tried to set out some of the new attitudes and mindsets we urgently require to meet this different world now upon us in a book to be published next month, which I have called ‘Look Where We’re Going: Escaping the Prism of Past Politics’.

We need indeed to look hard if we are to find a Golden Age, or more modestly, just to preserve our present living standards and security.

We have to carve out:

First and immediately ahead, new ways of engaging closely and on best terms with our European neighbours, mostly bilaterally but also with Europe’s modern institutions, free from the 20th century centralism and homogenization which has brought such strong and sustained populist reaction and soured bitterness throughout the European continent.

Second, new and closer links with the Asian powers, carefully (much more carefully than recently), balancing new Chinese ties with long-standing Japanese friendship and support, Japan being far our best friend in East Asia.

Third. A new Africa policy which recognises the significance emergence of the African Free Trade Area, the depth of Chinese involvement in Africa south of the Sahara and Africa’s fast increasing internal trade patterns.

Fourth a revival of British ties with Latin American nations and networks, once in the distant past so strong, but allowed to fall into decay.

And fifth, and most urgently, engagement in every field with the Commonwealth network of nations - right across all departments and agencies . This is today's jewel in the crown,, or ought to be. This is the fortunate legacy which we in Britain have been bequeathed, although hardly deserved .

This is the network of the third age, the family nexus which happens to fit like a glove into the revolution of connectivity which now has altered, and continues to alter , almost everything.

With populism in the West seeking to hijack democracy (again), with the rule of international law despised, with facts being ousted by fakes, here is one immense chain of like-minded peoples and societies which shines like gold in the surrounding mire of world violence , cruelty and illiberal intolerance.

If vision is needed let it be to ensure that we remain one of the strongest and brightest links in that chain.

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