



FEBRUARY 2022

Sign of the Times: How the United Kingdom's Integrated Review Affects Relations with Africa

Zainab Usman and Jonathan Glennie

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Summary

In March 2021, the British government published a vision document: “Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.”¹ Previously, the government had issued documents on security, defense, development, or foreign policy, but this integrated review bundled together all aspects of policy related to a vision of a so-called Global Britain. This newly integrated approach to policymaking mirrors a strategic consolidation within the UK government, specifically the merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to become a new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). While the review is framed as a necessary response to a changing global landscape, domestic political considerations around the British exit from the European Union (Brexit) weigh heavily. The review also points to the current UK government’s inclination to prize geopolitical competition over a previous emphasis on global cooperation.

Steep cuts to the UK’s generous foreign aid budget as well as the abolition of DFID have already drawn significant academic, policy, and media attention. Yet these actions are part of a broader UK strategy to redefine the country’s relations to the rest of the world, with significant implications beyond the controversial foreign aid cuts for poor countries, including those in Africa. The review will shape relations with a continent that has deep historical ties from the colonial era, a large diasporic presence, and long-standing economic relations with the UK. This analysis draws out the implications of the UK’s 2021 integrated review for African countries and recommends next steps for African and other international stakeholders to navigate the UK’s overhauled external relations strategy.

Implications for Africa From the UK's Five Strategic Directions

Shaping a global order of liberal democracies and free markets: African countries should expect stronger pressure from the UK on human rights and civic freedoms, as part of the UK's attempts to counter the authoritarian regimes and attitudes that it associates with global competitors like China and Russia. On the economic front, the UK's influence in global bodies such as the World Bank Group and the World Trade Organization (WTO) could be wielded for the continuation of free-market solutions over the adoption of the industrial policy solutions that many African countries need.

Projecting military might to deter adversaries: African countries could be under increasing pressure to shift from being somewhat neutral aid recipients and even business partners to becoming “allies” in the UK's military projection against its “adversaries,” in the language of the review. In at least ten countries and territories in Africa, the UK has military presence ranging from training and advisory support to peacekeeping missions and joint military bases. Such binary choices around military competition in a multipolar world may exacerbate conflict in hot spots in Africa. Yet some African countries could exchange any potential allyship with the UK for tangible commercial investments.

Shifting geographic focus to the Indo-Pacific: As the UK prepares for multipolar competition, the non-Western region most central to its interests is not in Africa but in Asia: the Indo-Pacific. East Africa and the larger African countries—such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa—seem to be of interest, but there is no clear UK strategy yet for the continent. Indeed, UK-Africa trade has been declining since 2012, when it peaked at \$43 billion, to about one third that amount, \$14 billion in 2020, although trade deals exist with sixteen African countries.

Decreasing development engagement: The UK's narrowing scope for international development and a reprioritization to focus on climate change rather than the previous emphasis on poverty reduction may result in decreasing development engagement with Africa. The UK's bilateral aid to African countries—of which about 66 percent was cut in 2021—may not recover if the cuts persist. The implications could be profound, because African countries receive the largest proportion—50.6 percent, amounting to around \$4 billion—of the UK's bilateral official development assistance (ODA) allocated to a specific region, as of 2019. As a consequence, Africa may receive less concessional and grant financing, though commercial investments from the UK are on an upward trend. In 2019, net UK foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to Africa reached a decade-high of nearly \$14 billion, although nearly 83 percent of UK investment stock in Africa is in the extractive industries of oil, gas, and mining, as well as in financial services. Meanwhile, industries with more job creation and transformation potential, such as manufacturing, information and communications, agriculture, construction, and electricity, each account for 1 percent or less of total UK FDI stock

in Africa.

Becoming a science and technology “superpower”: The review states that the UK aims to be a “Science and Tech Superpower by 2030” to sustain its strategic advantage in these areas.² The UK will employ several tools akin to industrial policies, including a high-skilled visa program to retain top global talent. The interest in attracting global talent creates both opportunities for high-skilled migration and uncertainties for asylum seekers and other migrants from African countries. Indeed, African nationals seeking to visit the UK for professional or business reasons experience a high level of visa refusals—at 27 percent, over double the average of 12 percent for other nationalities. Still, the large African diaspora in the UK, comprising 1.42 million people, is a resource for strengthening UK-Africa ties on science and tech.

Policy Recommendations

How should those interested in African progress, both policymakers on the continent and international partners, navigate the UK’s renewed strategy for competing in an emerging multipolar era?

African governments, civil society, and the diaspora in the UK should seek to influence the details of ongoing processes and action plans. These include the development-specific strategy scheduled for 2022, an Africa Strategy that has been in the works since 2018, and some country-specific consultations underway.

African countries will need to navigate this new era with agility in harnessing opportunities and managing risks. This approach will require managing risks to progress, such as substantial reductions in aid spending and a de-emphasis on poverty reduction. African countries can also optimize opportunities by leveraging the UK’s focus on climate change, global health, illicit finance, and other transnational challenges to push for more decisive action in these areas in concert with like-minded international partners; negotiating investment and trade deals that support technology and knowledge sharing in specific industries; and positioning for the Global Talent Visa program through coordinated knowledge exchange programs.

African countries can renegotiate, collectively and with other international partners, elements of the UK integrated review with an eye toward Africa’s own development priorities. African governments wanting to implement industrial policies that do not strictly follow the free-market tradition should work collectively through subregional and

continental bodies to advance these priorities in UK-Africa engagement.

Africa's international partners, including multilaterals and foundations, should adapt to, compensate for, and complement shifting UK priorities. Specifically, they should adjust to the reality of reduced UK support for key programs (including trust funds, knowledge generation, special projects, and regional initiatives), compensating for lost funding by complementing in areas, such as climate and health security, where the UK may expand its engagement.

Other international actors should prepare for a new normal. The direction communicated by the UK government is likely to be foundational to its thinking in the years to come. Other high-income Western countries may follow suit given the prevalent trends of a new multipolar order.

UK-Africa Relations by the Numbers

- There are **nineteen African countries in the Commonwealth**, most being former British colonies except Mozambique and Rwanda.
- The UK is the **fourth-largest bilateral donor** to Africa, providing **\$3.9 billion in 2019**, and the **third-largest donor** to Africa among countries in the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).³
- The UK has **trade deals with sixteen African countries** individually or through their regional economic communities.
- UK-Africa **trade has been declining** since it peaked at \$43 billion in 2012, down to \$14 billion in 2020.
- UK investors accounted for the **second-largest FDI stock** in Africa of \$66 billion in 2019, with nearly 83 percent concentrated in oil, gas, mining, and financial services.
- **1.42 million people** born in Africa live in the UK, making up 2 percent of the population.⁴ South Africans, Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Kenyans, and Ghanaians account for 56 percent of the total.

Introduction: A New Era for the UK's External Relations

The UK integrated review document reveals the UK's new risk and opportunity analysis for its external relations in this third decade of the twenty-first century. Given the internal bureaucratic politics within Whitehall and the haste with which the document was produced, it may not easily translate into an active planning document for British bureaucrats. Nevertheless, the substance of the integrated review symbolizes an inflection point for UK strategy toward Africa in a post-Brexit world.

Strategic Bureaucratic Consolidation

This integrated review reflects a wider bureaucratic consolidation within the UK government. In introducing the review, Prime Minister Boris Johnson described this consolidation as “integrating diplomacy and development to achieve greater impact and address the links between climate change and extreme poverty.”⁵ In September 2020, DFID merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to become a new office on foreign, commonwealth, and development, the FCDO. An essential aspect of this consolidation appears to be the demotion of international development as a government priority. With the abolition of DFID, there is no longer a senior minister for international development in the cabinet. A position established at DFID's creation in 1997 is thereby collapsed into the broader role of the foreign secretary, who now represents international development as well as foreign policy. This merger was followed by a decision in November 2020 to temporarily cut UK aid spending to 0.5 percent of gross national income from 0.7 percent to help the national budget's recovery

amid the coronavirus pandemic.⁶ Moreover, as its title suggests, the “Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy” is a policy document not just for the new FCDO, but also for the Ministry of Defence and indeed for the Home Office; importantly, UK ambassadors will be “fully accountable for cross-government objectives, not just the work of the FCDO,” according to the review.⁷

Notwithstanding the haphazard preparation, the integrated review and its associated policy actions could herald a new era for British foreign policy. The last-minute additions and bureaucratic bargaining among various UK government agencies that characterized the process partly explain the vague language and sometimes-conflicting objectives in the review. This moment is marked most clearly by DFID’s abolition in 2020 by a Conservative government, just as the agency’s creation in 1997 by then prime minister Tony Blair’s Labour government augured a different approach to the UK’s external relations. In turn, important shifts of policy emphasis reflect a changing global and domestic context. The Conservative Party, with its new post-Brexit vision, has a strong electoral mandate that could last a decade, and this integrated review may represent a turning point in the UK’s relationship with Africa.

While the significance of the review in a post-Brexit era is evident, its implications for UK foreign policy remain up for debate. Will it fundamentally shape the UK’s external relations, including with African countries, for the next decade? Or is it a document intended for a domestic audience, unlikely to result in fundamental British policy shifts? Previous documents, such as the 2015 UK Aid Review, “UK Aid: Tackling Global Challenges in the National Interest,” set out similar ideas; what distinguishes the UK integrated review in 2021?⁸ The review is to an extent the result of the usual internal government tussles, tight deadlines, and compliance requirements. But it also sheds light on a government still shaping an ambitious post-Brexit strategy for external relations.

A Post-Brexit Domestic Reorientation

Domestic politics are reflected in the narrative and in the stated objectives of the integrated review. While the document is presented as a response to a shifting global landscape (in fact, the review notes that “the world has changed considerably since the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, as has the UK’s place within it”), domestic political considerations weigh heavily.⁹ The United Kingdom is living through a turbulent historical moment. The British public is split down the middle on the UK’s decision to leave the European Union. Brexit is the most significant foreign policy decision of a generation and one that fundamentally underpins this review. The three-hundred-year-old political union between Scotland and England is also at stake: the Scottish National Party has become the largest party in Scotland and is seriously advocating another independence referendum. The union is mentioned frequently throughout the report. Presenting an external narrative of the UK as a global success story based on shared values will be a cornerstone of the domestic campaign to keep the United Kingdom together.

The resounding electoral victory of a pro-Brexit prime minister in December 2020 is taken as evidence that the British public chose to put the UK first above international issues. As the document states, “In the years ahead, our national security and international policy must do a better job of putting the interests and values of the British people at the heart of everything we do.”¹⁰ This UK-first agenda would entail prioritizing the country’s own economic and social problems. Indeed, the severe economic shock of the coronavirus pandemic on the UK, resulting in a 9.9 percent contraction in growth in 2020 and projections in 2021 of a slow rebound, has cemented that view.¹¹ A YouGov survey showed that two-thirds (66 percent) of the British public supported a reduction in spending on overseas aid.¹² By explicitly putting the British public at its center, the integrated review document appears to show that the UK’s foreign policy aims of balancing national self-interest (both short term and strategic) and internationalist values have shifted decisively toward the former. A discernible message is that the international order should be shaped for the UK’s benefit.

Positioning for Great Power Competition

The title of the review, “Global Britain in a Competitive Age,” points to the current UK government’s inclination to prioritize geopolitical competition in the twenty-first century over previous administrations’ emphasis on cooperation. This approach echoes that taken by the United States, as reflected in remarks President Joe Biden made after his first hundred days in office: “We are in competition with China and other countries to win the 21st century. . . . We are at a great inflection point in history. We have to do more than just build back better. . . . We have to compete more strenuously.”¹³

The rise of China and other emerging markets is the backdrop to this review, from its defense and diplomacy aspects to its vision for development policy. When DFID was created a quarter of a century ago, it was possible to view the UK as a major power—by virtue of its relative wealth as the world’s fourth-largest economy and its history of colonial rule—that supported poverty reduction in poorer regions.¹⁴ In the late 1990s, the UK still allocated large volumes of aid funding to China, India, and Latin America. But today it is down a few rungs on the economic ladder, varying between the fifth- and the sixth-largest economy in the world following the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the more recent economic downturn due to the coronavirus pandemic, and the socioeconomic turbulence of Brexit.¹⁵ Thus, the UK government, alongside sections of the British public, is reassessing their country’s commitment to international development.

The UK, with this integrated review, now appears to set aside the doctrine of cooperation and charity by default in favor of advancing its own interests more explicitly. This paradigm shift is not unlike the reality for other major powers like China, France, Japan, and the United States, where foreign policies conspicuously integrate national interest. Having

DFID as a separate entity—with (notably) a far greater budget than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—worked when the UK was economically stronger. It is less feasible now that the UK is outside the European Union.

Africa in the 2021 UK Integrated Review: Five Major Strategic Directions

Five major strategic directions with implications for Africa are discernible from the 2021 UK integrated review. The UK's new foreign policy directions are: shaping a global order of liberal democracies and free markets; projecting military might with allies to challenge adversaries; shifting geographic focus to the Indo-Pacific; decreasing development engagement by elevating climate change as the UK's top international development priority; and becoming a science and tech superpower by 2030 through industrial policies, including a high-skilled visa program.

Shaping a Global Order of Open Societies and Economies

“We must show that the freedom to speak, think and choose—and therefore to innovate—offers an inherent advantage; and that liberal democracy and free markets remain the best model for the social and economic advancement of humankind.” —“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,” 3.

The bedrock values of this review lie in this bold restatement of the UK's commitment to open economies, open societies, and an open international order. Shaping the international order is one of the review's overarching objectives. The UK has always supported democracy and free trade in principle, but their prominence is strong in this document and with real implications for relations with Africa. Given perceived rising global threats to free societies, the document asserts that the UK “will play a *more active* part in sustaining an international order in which open societies and economies continue to flourish and the benefits of prosperity are shared through free trade and global growth” (emphasis added).¹⁶ Mention of “religious and media freedom” may also imply that the UK will engage with human rights issues more boldly in years to come.¹⁷

How will this restated belief in free societies and markets translate into geopolitical relationships? As the UK steps up its resistance to the authoritarian regimes and illiberal attitudes that it associates with global competitors (like China and Russia), African countries should expect greater pressure to respect human rights and civic freedoms. And as Western donor

funding to illiberal regimes comes under more scrutiny, the principles of free and open societies may come to bear on the UK's economic relations with Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, among others.¹⁸ The power and influence wielded by the UK in global bodies such as the World Bank Group and the WTO could be used to press for the continuation of familiar free-market solutions of the past three decades rather than the innovative public-facing solutions many African countries would favor. Take as examples the UK's reticence to lead discussions around debt relief at the G20 or the UK's resistance to South Africa and India's WTO proposal for intellectual property waivers on COVID-19 vaccine technologies.¹⁹

At the same time, there are few concrete details in the integrated review on the direction of future trade relations with Africa, characteristic of the ambiguity of the document. But other UK government documents can supplement understanding. For instance, in a guidance note to end all overseas financing of fossil fuel projects, the UK's development bank, the CDC Group—which is rebranding to become British International Investment—makes some exceptions for gas projects in low-income countries.²⁰ The exception in the CDC white paper could demonstrate the UK's willingness in some cases to consider the unique situation of lower-income countries.

Projecting Military Might to Deter Adversaries

“We will remain a nuclear-armed power with global reach and integrated military capabilities across all five operational domains. . . . Our diplomacy will be underwritten by the credibility of our deterrent and our ability to project power.” —“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,” 7.

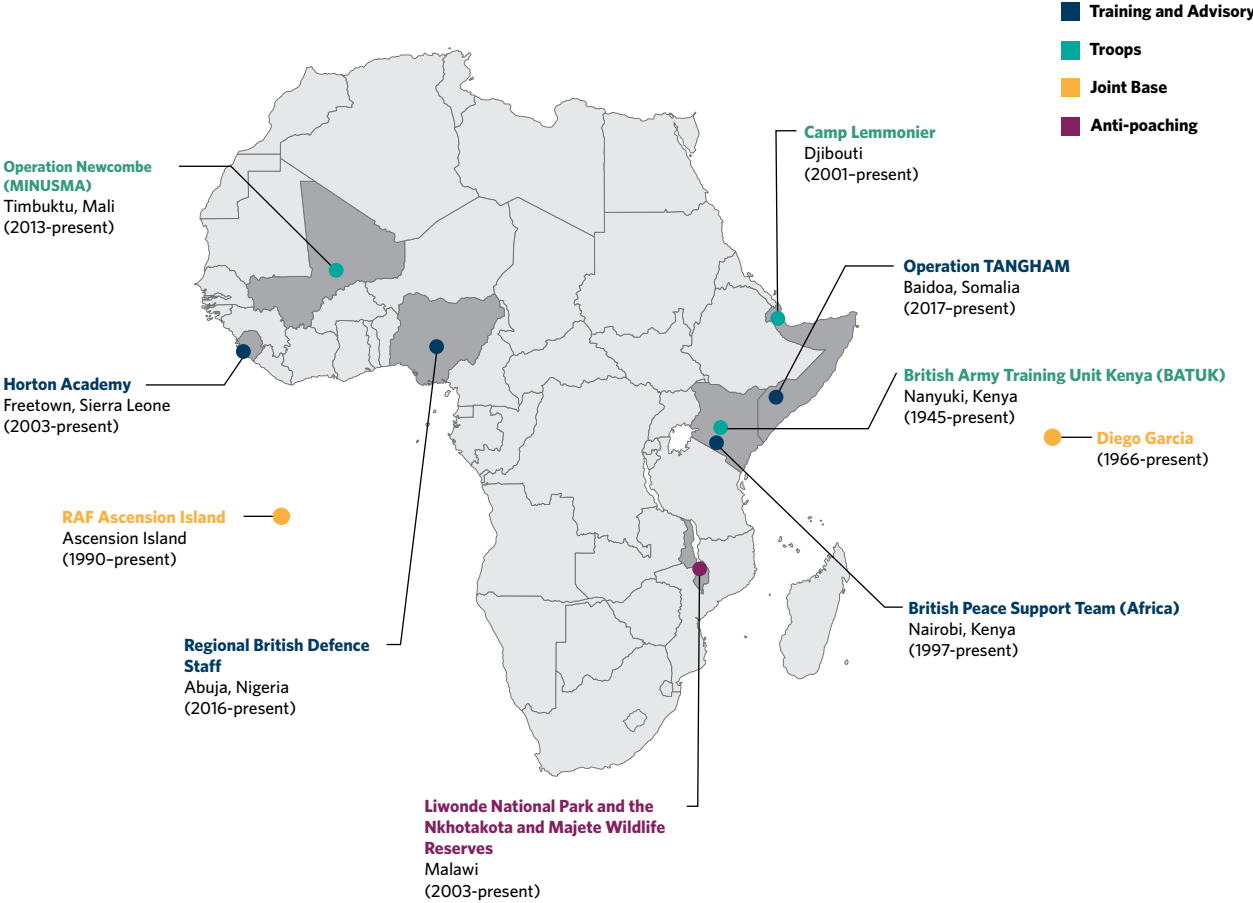
Another notable shift in this review is the articulation of the UK's intent to project its military might. In November 2020, the UK announced what reporters called “the biggest boost in military spending since the end of the Cold War” with a 10 percent increase in the defense budget.²¹ This rise in defense spending was accompanied by strong language on nuclear defense and a triumphant description of the delivery of a new aircraft carrier called the *HMS Queen Elizabeth*.²²

Africa may feature as a potential political partner in British efforts to advance open and free societies and economies supported by military projection. The world is presented in this review in the binary language of “allies” (those who support free trade and liberal democracy) and “adversaries” (those who threaten the international order, such as China and Russia). African countries could face increasing pressure to shift from somewhat neutral aid recipients and even business partners to “allies” in the UK's international projection of military might. The UK already has a foundation to build upon were it to increase its military presence in Africa; it has military presence or engagement in at least nine countries

and territories in Africa (see map 1).²³ This presence includes training and advisory support in Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Somalia; peacekeeping missions in Mali; and joint military bases at Ascension Island and Diego Garcia.²⁴ In 2020, the UK’s largest-ever United Nations (UN) mission ended in South Sudan.²⁵

In a more contested multipolar system, the UK is positioning itself to assert its relevance among the great powers of the twenty-first century and may want to count on supporters in Africa. In its quest to maintain “international order,” according to the integrated review, the UK will seek to carry out “regulatory diplomacy,” “[science and technology] diplomacy,” “cyber diplomacy,” and other kinds of diplomacy to bring countries on board.²⁶ African governments should be prepared for involved and even fraught negotiations between global powers that may play out on the continent. Of course, African countries have experienced this kind of tension before, when they had to contend with Africa’s place as a battleground in the Cold War between East and West. This militaristic competition in a multipolar world may exacerbate conflict in hot spots in Africa if global players funnel resources into different

Map 1. UK Military Presence in Africa in 2021



Source: Compiled from various government, scholarly, and news media sources. See endnote 23 for full list.

parts of the political spectrum on the continent. This trend has already been displayed with the deployment of Russian mercenaries in Sudan and the Central African Republic and of French special forces in the Sahel.²⁷ It may also be possible for some countries to leverage any potential allyship with the UK for tangible commercial investments and economic engagements, as African countries have done in partnership with France and the United States.²⁸

Shifting Geographic Focus to the Indo-Pacific

“In the decades to come [the Indo-Pacific region] will be the crucible for many of the most pressing global challenges—from climate and biodiversity to maritime security and geopolitical competition linked to rules and norms.” —“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,” 66.

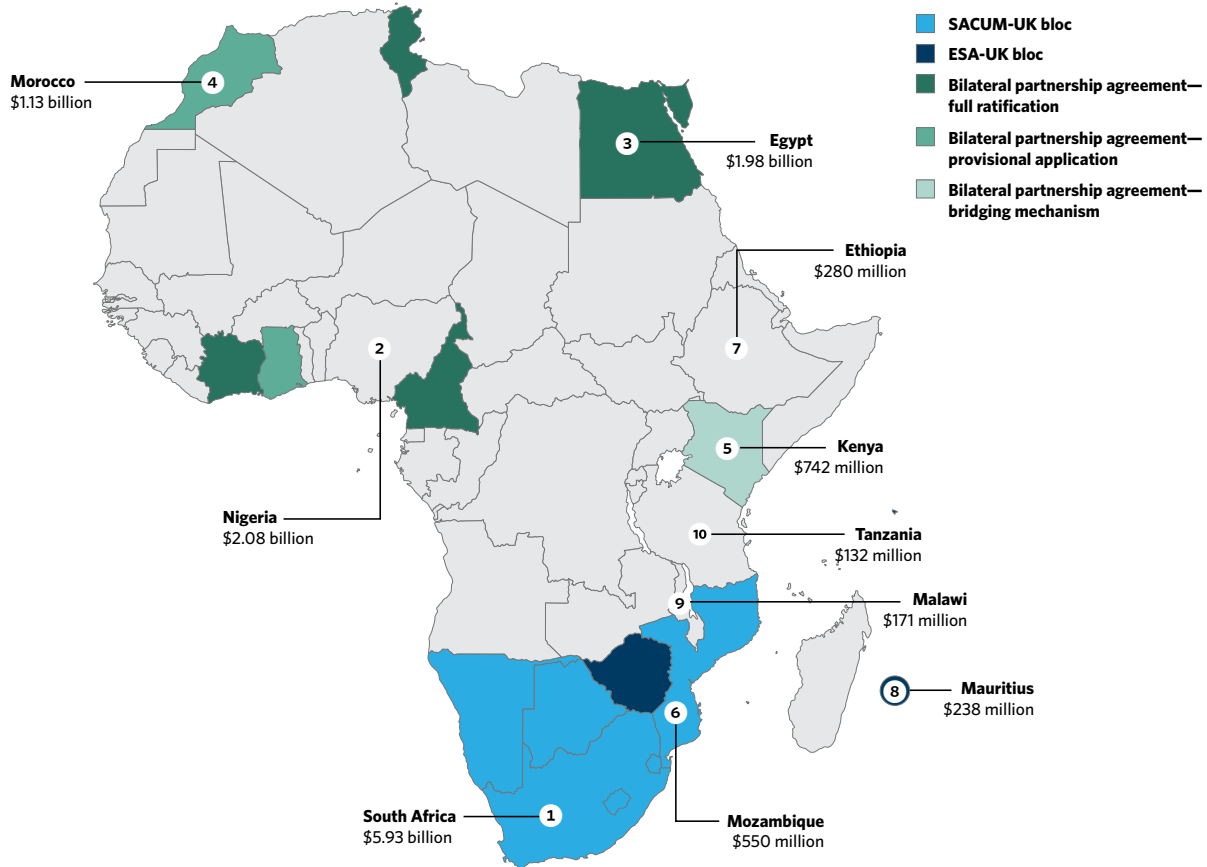
As the UK prepares for multipolar competition, the non-Western region most central to its interests will not be Africa but Asia, specifically the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, a new phrase has entered the foreign policy lexicon in the UK: “Indo-Pacific tilt.” China is clearly the focus of this tilt, but Australia, India, and Southeast Asia also feature. According to the integrated review, the UK wishes to be the key European partner in this region, with a focus on economic opportunities, security, and the values of an open society. In its 2022–2026 strategy announced in November 2021, the CDC Group will “pivot to Asia and, in particular, South East Asia.”²⁹ In this geographic pivot to Asia and the Caribbean, CDC will also provide investments in Africa.

Nevertheless, some African economies could be of interest to the UK government. The document notes that “our future prosperity will be enhanced by deepening our economic connections with dynamic parts of the world such as the Indo-Pacific, *Africa* and the Gulf” (emphasis added).³⁰

East Africa and the major African economies seem to be of interest, but there does not appear to be a vision for the continent. The subregion East Africa may be relevant to UK foreign policy because of concerns about insecurity and terrorism spilling over via Europe. The large African economies are important for economic and geopolitical reasons: the review asserts that “we will work in partnership with South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana in particular to further our shared prosperity goals, our democratic values and our security interests.”³¹ Four of those countries are among the UK’s largest trade partners on the continent (see map 2).

Where Africa is mentioned in the review, it is to advance the UK’s strategic geopolitical interests with limited consideration of the continent’s own economic development priorities. While Johnson has stated that he wants the UK to be the “investment partner of choice” for Africa, the reality may play out differently.³² Although the UK has trade deals with sixteen out of fifty-four African countries, overall trade with Africa has been declining (see map 2). Trade peaked in 2012 at \$43 billion, but fell to about one third of that amount, \$14 billion,

Map 2. The UK's Ten Largest Trade Partners in Africa, 2020

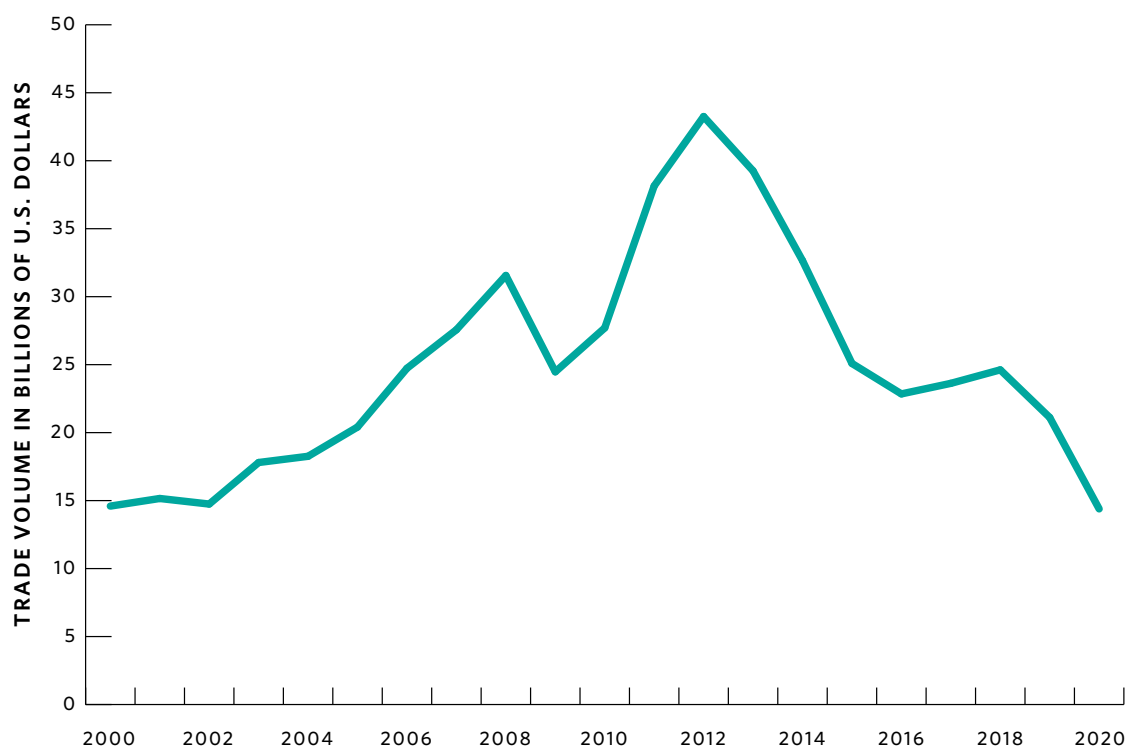


Source: Author calculations from World Integrated Trade Solution database, World Bank, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org>; and Department for International Trade, “Guidance: UK Trade Agreements With Non-EU Countries,” updated December 9, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-trade-agreements-with-non-eu-countries#trade-agreements-in-effect>.

Note: The SACUM-UK bloc refers to the Economic Partnership Agreement between the UK and the Southern African Customs Union member states and Mozambique. The ESA-UK bloc refers to the Economic Partnership Agreement between the UK and Eastern and Southern Africa countries.

in 2020 (see figure 1). The UK was also the first non-African country to formally commit to supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement, signing a memorandum of understanding in September 2021.³³ Yet the integrated review identifies “poor governance and disorder, particularly in Africa and the Middle East” as factors in rising terrorism and extremism, specifying the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya as sites for investment in regional stability and defense cooperation.³⁴ The tilt toward Asia in the review implies that Africa might struggle to be heard in the next decade even as the continent seeks to leverage trade for its economic transformation. While other continents are seen as growing economic partners, Africa could again be relegated to the periphery of UK commercial partnerships and investment decisions.

Figure 1. UK-Africa Trade Volume, 2000-2020



Source: Author calculations from the World Integrated Trade Solution database, World Bank, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org>.

Decreasing Development Engagement

“In 2021 and beyond, Her Majesty’s Government will make tackling climate change and biodiversity loss its number one international priority.” —“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,” 32.

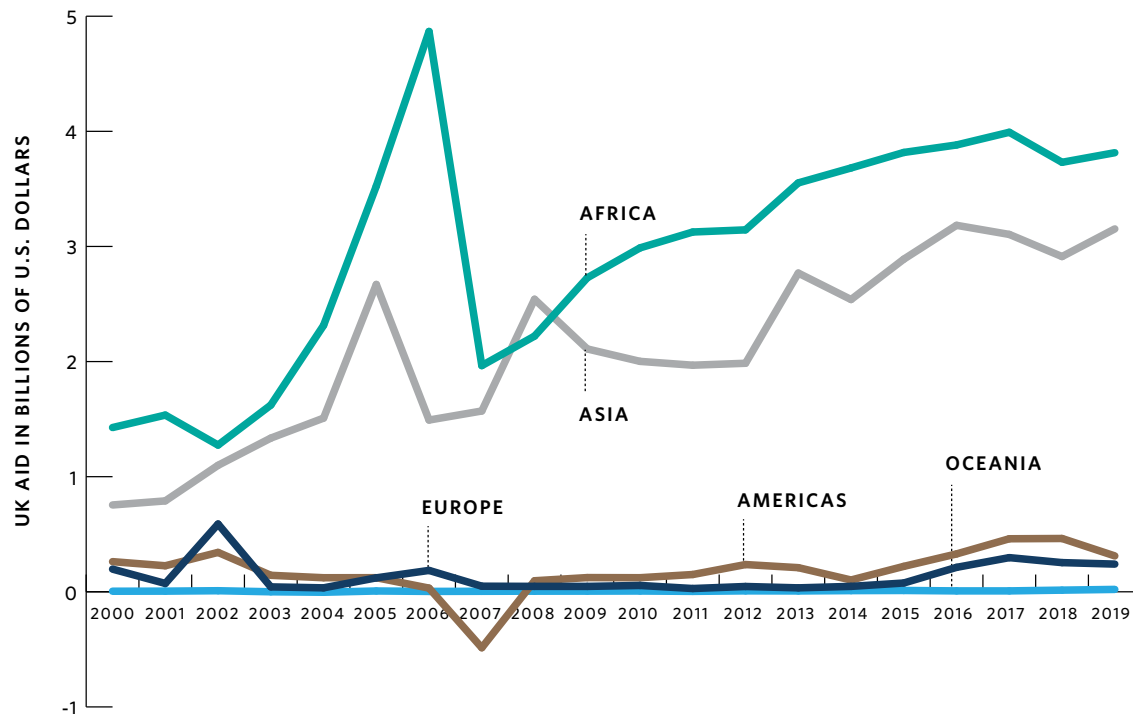
In a profound shift, the UK’s top international development priority is now to address climate change and other transnational challenges; poverty reduction has been downgraded. The UK’s decisions to abolish DFID and reduce the budget for ODA—buttressed by explicit expressions of national self-interest in the integrated review—indicate a narrower scope for international development and a reprioritization of focus areas. The UK’s international development priorities will be more fully laid out in a global development policy paper slated for later in 2022. However, in the review itself, climate change and biodiversity are strategic international priorities. These are followed by other transnational challenges that the UK aims to focus on—including health security, migration, illicit finance, and terrorism—and areas crucial to its national interests, such as science and technology trade and cybersecurity.

For African countries, this change will likely result in decreasing development engagement from the UK. The UK government claims that it “will maintain our commitment to Africa, with a particular focus on East Africa and on important partners such as Nigeria, while increasing development efforts in the Indo-Pacific.”³⁵ Yet if ODA cuts persist beyond 2021, the UK’s bilateral aid to Africa—of which about 66 percent was cut in 2021—may never recover.³⁶ At best, it will be funneled more narrowly, with girls’ education and environmental sustainability at the top of the UK’s stated development priorities. The implications could be profound, because Africa receives the largest proportion of UK bilateral ODA allocated to a specific region.³⁷ In 2019, the continent received 50.6 percent of UK ODA (\$3.8 billion) compared with Asia’s 41.8 percent (\$3.1 billion), the Americas’ 4.1 percent (\$311 million), Europe’s 3.2 percent (\$240 million), and Oceania’s 0.3 percent (\$20 million) (see figure 2). Five of the top ten recipients of UK ODA are African countries: Ethiopia (\$382 million), Nigeria (\$330 million), South Sudan (\$265 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (\$236 million), and Somalia (\$224 million).

Africa should expect less concessional and grant financing as more countries graduate toward middle-income status, although other kinds of financial flows could increase. The integrated review explicitly acknowledges this eventuality: “As governments become able to finance their own development priorities, we will gradually move towards providing UK expertise in place of grants and using a variety of financing models to tackle regional challenges in our mutual interests.”³⁸ In theory, reduced ODA flows (either from budget cuts or from the transition to middle-income status) should not foreclose other avenues for development engagement through technical assistance around trade facilitation, support for localization of value chains, and knowledge transfer in specific industries where the UK has a comparative advantage. Climate finance could be another area where the UK devotes considerable resources. Between 2011 and 2017, nearly 5 billion British pounds of UK foreign aid have been spent on 284 climate change projects, with Africa receiving the most regional funding at 826 million pounds.³⁹ The UK hosted the UN Climate Change Conference, the UK’s largest-ever diplomatic summit, in November 2021 in Glasgow.⁴⁰ CDC plans to devote up to 2 billion pounds (over \$2.7 billion) per annum of investments in climate finance, green infrastructure, and digital transformation in the Indo-Pacific and the Caribbean, mainly, but also in some parts of Africa.⁴¹

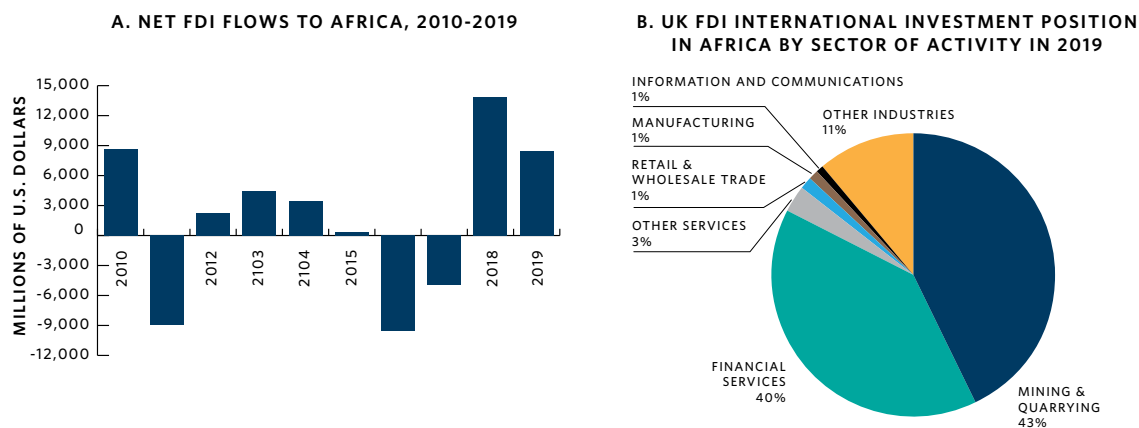
Finally, as concessional financing declines, UK commercial investments in Africa could rise. British private investment flows to Africa have been growing. UK investors accounted for the second-largest FDI stock in Africa of \$66 billion in 2019, an increase from \$58 billion in 2015, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development.⁴² Net UK FDI flows to Africa bounced back from years of contraction to nearly \$14 billion in 2018 (a decade-high) and \$8 billion in 2019 (see figure 3a). Yet nearly 83 percent of UK FDI stock in Africa is to be found in financial services and the extractive industries of oil, gas, and mining (see figure 3b). Meanwhile, industries such as manufacturing, information and communications, agriculture, construction, and electricity each account for 1 percent or less of total FDI stock in Africa. These latter industries with job creation and transformation potential represent future growth areas in which to attract private investments from UK companies.

Figure 2. Africa Receives the Highest Volume of UK Bilateral Aid



Source: Author calculations from OECD.Stat, "Aid (ODA) Disbursements to Countries and Regions [DAC2a]," Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://stats.oecd.org>.

Figure 3. UK Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Flows and Sector of Activity



Source: Author calculations from "Foreign Direct Investment Involving UK Companies (Directional): Outward," UK Office for National Statistics, released December 21, 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessinnovation/datasets/foreigndirectinvestmentinvolvingukcompaniesoutwardtables>.

Becoming a Science and Tech Superpower

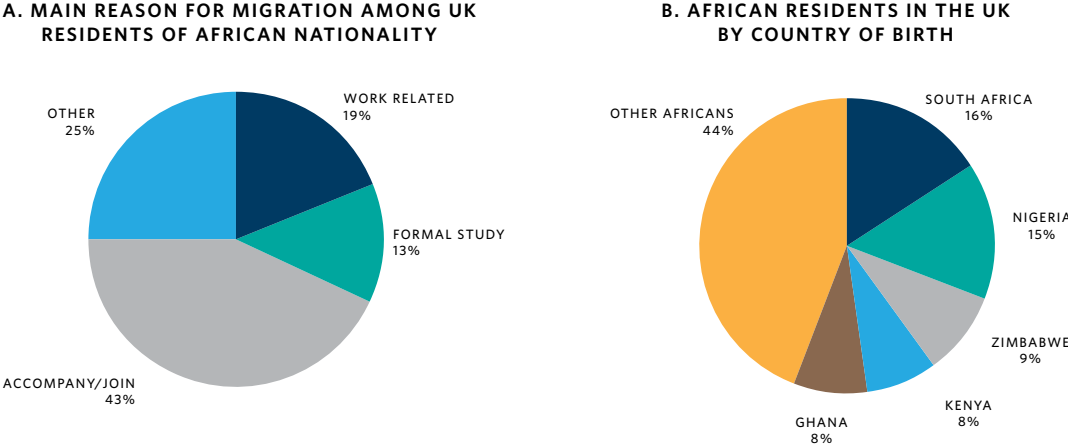
“Our aim is to have secured our status as a Science and Tech Superpower by 2030, by redoubling our commitment to research and development, bolstering our global network of innovation partnerships, and improving our national skills—including by attracting the world’s best and brightest to the UK through our new Global Talent Visa.” —“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,”⁴

The UK identifies “sustaining strategic advantage through science and technology” as one of its four overarching foreign policy objectives for the next decade.⁴³ This priority placed on leadership in science and technology is driven by the UK’s desire to maintain strategic advantage in a competitive multipolar system. The document’s reiteration of the need to prevent “corruption, manipulation, exploitation or the theft of our intellectual property” anticipates the UK’s eventual position on COVID-19 vaccines and intellectual property at the WTO.⁴⁴ The UK is one of the countries that blocked proposals at the WTO to temporarily waive intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines at the height of the pandemic, despite the potential of such a measure to help scale up vaccine production around the world.⁴⁵

In advancing science and technology for strategic advantage, several tools akin to industrial policies will be employed. A “whole-of-UK effort” is proposed in which the government would develop the infrastructure; create the enabling environment for an ecosystem of scientists, researchers, business, and regulators; and work alongside the manufacturing industry to commercialize innovations.⁴⁶ The UK also aims to attract top global talent to advance the goal of becoming a tech superpower. Through a newly established Office for Talent, the government will focus on high-skilled immigration for top scientists, researchers, and innovators from around the world. High-skilled migration will be achieved through a Global Talent Visa targeting established professionals and a new Graduate Route for international graduates to secure skilled jobs in the UK.⁴⁷

The UK’s interest in attracting top global talent to become a science and tech superpower creates opportunities and uncertainties around its migration policy for African countries. While the government is clearly prioritizing high-skilled migrants, the fate of other forms of migrants—such as asylum seekers and refugees—is not clear. The promise of a welcoming environment for top talent regardless of nationality confronts the reality of hard borders as the UK visa program remains arbitrary, expensive, time-consuming, and humiliating, especially for Africans. A recent report commissioned by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa found that African nationals seeking to visit the UK for professional or business reasons experience a high level of visa refusals.⁴⁸ Between September 2016 and September 2018, the refusal rate that African nationals experienced for UK visit visas was 27 percent, over double the average of 12 percent and much higher than the Middle East’s 11 percent, Asia’s 11 percent, and North America’s 4 percent.⁴⁹

Figure 4. Snapshots of African Migrants in the UK, July 2019–June 2020



Source: Author calculations from “Population and Migration,” UK Office for National Statistics, accessed August 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration>.

Overall, high-skilled migration policy may be streamlined and simplified to meet the UK’s ambitions in science and technology in the mold of other countries. High-income countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States have long relied on the strategic use of work visas and other migration pathways for skilled professionals. There is also China’s approach of strengthening the global competitiveness of its tech firms by expanding to Africa. The large African diaspora in the UK is a resource that should be utilized. Of the 1.4 million people of African nationality in the UK,⁵⁰ 184,000 (nearly 13 percent) migrated for formal study while 19 percent are in the UK for work-related reasons (see figure 4). Through this diaspora, the UK can strengthen its ties with the home countries of African migrants—especially Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, where fintech and other digital innovations are taking place.

Policy Recommendations

The UK’s integrated review signals a policy reorientation as the British government navigates a more competitive multipolar system. Those interested in African progress—governments, businesses, and civil society on the continent, as well as international partners such as multilaterals, international nongovernmental organizations, and foundations—will be affected by these changes. How should they respond to the UK’s new approach?

What African Stakeholders Should Do

Influence the details of ongoing processes. While the UK government's new approach to Africa is previewed in the integrated review, some caution should be exercised to avoid reading too much into this strategy. African countries should engage with the UK government in the months and years ahead as it develops the detailed plans underlying the strategy articulated in the review. There are plans to produce a development-specific strategy in 2022, an Africa Strategy has been promised since 2018, and some country-specific consultations are underway. The large and influential African countries mentioned in the review—Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa—as well as the African diaspora in the UK are positioned to help shape those strategies. And the poorer countries most affected by UK decisions to reduce development engagement (such as Ethiopia, Malawi, and Rwanda, for which ODA constitutes more than 50 percent of their government budgets) may choose to work through regional bodies to influence the details of the UK's Africa engagement.⁵¹ Science and technology, high-skilled migration, climate change, and illicit financial flows provide the most fertile areas for possible influence.

Harness opportunities and reduce risk. The five shifts set out in this document give African countries a broad road map for what to expect from the UK over the next decade. African countries will need to navigate this new era with agility to harness opportunities and manage risks. First, they will need to manage risks to progress, including substantial reductions in aid spending and an overall de-emphasis on development. Current aid programs focusing on nonpriority themes and regions of Africa should prepare for severe and possibly permanent cuts to funding. Second, by optimizing opportunities, African governments can leverage the UK's focus on climate change, global health, illicit finance, and other transnational challenges to push for more decisive action in these areas. In a post-Brexit context, the UK is eager to strike trade deals and encourage investment to replace the relationship with the European Union. African countries, particularly the larger economies, can aim to negotiate investment and trade deals that support technology and knowledge sharing in specific industries. Through its Global Talent Visa program, the UK could attract top talent from Africa in coordinated knowledge exchange programs. African business in turn can strengthen and leverage ties with the diaspora in the UK toward this aim. African civil society might similarly find a willing partner in the UK to focus on civil rights and democracy. Opportunities exist to forge partnerships.

Negotiate for their own priorities. African countries can negotiate, collectively and with other allies, elements of the vision laid out in the UK's integrated review with an eye toward Africa's own development priorities. The demotion of development may not align with the priorities of African countries and their multilateral partners that aspire to raise income levels in specific areas. For instance, in bilateral and multilateral economic relations involving poorer countries, the UK could double down on a free-market approach. Such an approach is at odds with African interests in economic transformation through Agenda 2063, regional integration in the African Continental Free Trade Area, and country-specific development strategies that will require increased government coordination. African

governments wanting to implement industrial policies, such as higher taxes and public investments, that do not follow the free-market tradition may not find a willing ally in the UK and should work collectively through subregional and continental bodies. On other issues—such as climate finance, COVID-19 vaccines, fairer global taxation, and illicit financial flows—African governments, business, and civil society may have to find the right international allies among multilaterals, bilaterals, and foundations around the world.

What Other International Partners Should Do

Adapt to, compensate for, and complement shifting UK priorities. Other international partners of Africa must come to terms with the gaps that will be left by less UK aid and then compensate for them. Some African countries, such as Nigeria and South Africa, will barely notice the UK's new direction, aid being such a small share of their national income. Others, like Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Uganda, may be significantly affected. Development actors, including multilateral agencies and philanthropic organizations, should be prepared to adapt to changes in concessional funding and reduced interest from the UK in key programs, including trust funds at the World Bank and UN agencies, to which the UK is often a major contributor (such as the Nigeria Economic Reform and Governance Project, the Ethiopia Protection of Basic Services fund, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for South Sudan, Multisectoral Technical Assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cooperation in International Waters in Africa).⁵² Likewise, development actors should be prepared to complement areas where the UK may expand its engagement, including on climate and health security.

Prepare for a new normal. The direction the UK government communicated in the integrated review is likely to be foundational to its thinking in the years to come. Other high-income countries, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, may follow suit given the prevalent trends of a new multipolar order.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Juliette Ovadia, Jimmy Vulembera, and Alexander Csanadi for research assistance.

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