

CRISPIN BLUNT

for Foreign Affairs

Committee Chair



MY RECORD

During my chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee over the previous Parliament, I sought to bring together an independence of mind with a commitment to teamwork across party lines. We have raised the profile of the Committee and made a bigger impact on the Foreign Affairs issues of the day with measurable successes across a range of issues.

SYRIA

At the outset, we shaped the debate on whether the UK should conduct airstrikes against ISIL in Syria. Our report was used by Members across the House as we set out the issues that the Government needed to address before undertaking military action. This was the first time in the history of Select Committees that a Prime Minister responded directly to a Select Committee report.

EUROPEAN UNION

On Brexit, the most divisive yet crucial issue of the day, the Committee was split down the middle in their publicly-held positions. Holding the casting vote, I chose not to push through an endorsement of my personal views, but rather remained committed to building the consensus needed to adopt a unanimous report that offered the public and the House a sober consideration of the implications of either outcome. Subsequent to the referendum, the Committee published two more reports on equipping the Government for Brexit and the implications of 'no deal'.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Under the Committee's cross-questioning, the Permanent Under Secretary of the FCO admitted that Human Rights was "not one of the top priorities" of the FCO, so the Committee pressed the Government to restore the prominence of Human Rights in British diplomacy. Following specific recommendations from the Committee, the Government subsequently included Egypt and Bahrain in their annual list of human rights priority countries and flew the Rainbow Flag over the Foreign Office on Pride day.

FUNDING

We moved quickly in advance of the 2015 Spending Review to get to grips with the FCO's under-funding issues and recommended that the Treasury protect the FCO's budget, which it did. Throughout all our work we have argued for the FCO to be properly resourced, as a matter of national security and to present Britain in its new global role.

LIBYA

Our report reviewing the UK's role in the 2011 intervention in Libya, actions since, and policy options now. It was widely reported and unsparing in its critique of our senior decision makers. It demonstrated the strength of the 2015-17 Foreign Affairs Committee in its independence and unity in holding the Executive to account, and made an important contribution to the necessary 'lessons learned' exercise from the intervention.

AN ACTIVE COMMITTEE

The Committee's overall work programme was extensive, as we produced comprehensive reports on broader issues ranging from the UK's management of Political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood Review, ISIL financing, and bilateral relations with Russia and Turkey.

I was determined to get the most out of the Committee, and ran a full agenda of formal and informal meetings with the diplomatic corps, foreign dignitaries, and analysts. I was keen for us to go to some of the most challenging yet important places, such as Eastern Ukraine, Kurdistan, and the Turkish-Syrian border.

FUTURE WORK

The gap in Select Committee work caused by the Election makes it all the more imperative that the Committee hits the ground running and resumes its work programme and scrutiny of Government. I would hope that the new Committee will resume our inquiries on UK-China relations and the UK's role in the Middle East Peace Process that were cut short by the dissolution after we had already received substantial amounts of evidence. I would also hope to build on our work in the previous Parliament and follow up on inquiries into UK policy towards Russia, Turkey, and Libya.

EUROPEAN UNION

At the last EU Inter-Parliamentary conference on Foreign and Security Policy I presented my paper on a potential framework for close and structured cooperation with our EU partners that is necessary to address our common foreign and security challenges. I believe the Committee should make proposals on this key area of future policy. The Committee should look at other areas of foreign policy affected by Brexit, such as the adaptation of sanctions legislation, where the Committee should have a role in pre-legislative scrutiny with the publication of a draft bill.

SYRIA

I hope to take the lessons from the Committee's work on intervention in Syria in the previous Parliament to ensure that, ahead of any future decisions, we have an appropriate process for debate and consultation between Parliament and the Executive. This was thrown into stark view with the US action following the use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikoun in April and I am working with the European Council on Foreign Relations on the prospects for UK involvement in a future similar scenario, which I hope can inform any future parliamentary debate and Committee examination.

PRESIDENT TRUMP

A new and unique US administration is throwing up knotty foreign policy questions. The Committee should assess how the Government manages Anglo-American relations at a time of policy uncertainty with implications for a range of issues such as security cooperation, international agreements, and the State Visit.

BRITISH SOFT POWER

As the UK leaves the EU and redefines its role in the world, we will need to be acutely aware of our soft power assets and how to make them work best for the UK. I am working with the British Council and ResPublica on this and hope that this will feed into the Committee's future work.

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

It is nearly a decade since a predecessor Committee carried out a wide-ranging review of policy towards the Overseas Territories. Repeat examination is overdue, not least given UK responsibilities for their security and the important role of some in the global financial system.

GOING FORWARD

The Committee needs to be fleet of foot as global events develop, notably with the ongoing crisis in the Gulf, and tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the South China Sea. There is much work to be done in this Parliament to oversee the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during these times of great change on the international stage. Please feel free to contact me to discuss any of these issues further on

