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Membership

HM Opposition

Emily Thornberry MP*

Nia Griffith MP†¹

Kate Osamor MP

Keir Starmer MP

NEC

Cath Speight*

George Howarth MP

Glenis Willmott MEP

CLPs and Regions

Iona Baker

Bev Clack

Nick Davies

Glyn Ford

James Frith

Sam Gurney

Wajid Khan

Alex Mayer

Trudie McGuinness

Paul O’Kane

Bryony Rudkin

Affiliates

Emma Burnell

Ken Curran

Sonny Leong

Len McCluskey

Dave Quayle

Mick Whelan

Elected Reps

Afzal Khan MEP

Sue Lent

Emma Reynolds MP

John Woodcock MP

* Co-convenor

†¹ Replaced Clive Lewis MP

Policy Development

The International Policy Commission develops Labour Party policy on foreign affairs, defence, international development, and Britain's departure from and future relations with the European Union.

The events of the past year have changed the global landscape and brought significant challenges. Following the EU referendum, there has been much debate about Britain's ambitions, capabilities and international role. The election of President Trump in the United States has prompted questions about the future shape of the transatlantic alliance, as well as uncertainty about American leadership on a range of global issues.

The Article 50 negotiations may have begun, but Britain's future relationship with the EU is little clearer than it was a year ago, with the Conservatives pursuing an extreme and reckless approach to Brexit. The context in Europe has evolved over the past 12 months. The EU is dealing with a raft of common internal challenges, from instability in the Eurozone to the ongoing refugee crisis. But it has been galvanised by stronger economic growth and election and referendum results in France, the Netherlands and Austria, where populist and Eurosceptic candidates failed to secure the levels of support that some had feared.

The debate over Britain's post-Brexit relations with Europe and the rest of the world is taking place against a wider backdrop of insecurity and volatility: deepening civil wars in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan; the growing threat of nuclear conflict on the Korean peninsula; a resurgent Russia and a more militarily assertive China. Even as a devastating humanitarian crisis has taken hold in East Africa and beyond, the UK's cross-party consensus on spending 0.7 per cent of national income on international aid appears to be fraying because of the Conservatives' divided approach to this issue. At the same time, the decision by the new US administration to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement could have profound implications for the fight against global warming.

The Commission has examined Britain's place in this ever-changing international context, and worked to develop progressive policies that can meet the challenges we face, drawing on the expertise and experience of members, civil society, trade unions and representatives from Labour's sister parties.

Annual Conference 2016

The year's work began at Conference in September 2016 with two seminars; the first on foreign policy, defence and development, and the second on Brexit. The international policy seminar was held on 26 September, with several dozen delegates taking part in a lively debate. Cath Speight chaired the seminar, taking contributions from the floor and engaging the Shadow Cabinet members – Emily Thornberry MP, Clive Lewis MP and Kate Osamor MP, as well as Richard Howitt MEP – in a substantive policy discussion.

A number of delegates discussed the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and the response of the UK and other western powers. A number of points were made about defence policy, in particular the decision made by Parliament to renew the UK's nuclear deterrent. The issue of military intervention was also considered, with several delegates voicing concerns about the use of force, and asking how Labour can most effectively learn the lessons of the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq War, while others stressed that it is important that Britain remains prepared to intervene in certain situations. The meeting also considered Labour's international development priorities, with concerns raised about the Conservatives' approach to the aid budget.

The Brexit policy seminar offered delegates the opportunity to share views with members of the Shadow Cabinet and the European Parliamentary Labour Party. Around 80 delegates took part, discussing the outcome of the EU referendum and Labour's approach to Brexit. Cath Speight chaired the seminar, taking contributions from the floor and allowing the panel – Emily Thornberry MP, Keir Starmer MP, Barry Gardiner MP and Richard Howitt MEP – to respond. A number of delegates made points about what the vote to leave the EU represented and what compelled a majority to vote for Brexit. Many felt it was important that the economy and the protection of people's jobs and living standards should be the overriding concerns moving forward, and that Britain should seek an ambitious future deal with the EU that provides as great a degree of access to the Single Market as possible.

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National Policy Forum meeting

The themes and ideas emerging from the discussions at Annual Conference were fed back to the rest of the National Policy Forum at the meeting in Loughborough in November, through a number of Brexit and international policy breakout sessions. NPF representatives identified a number of key issues for consideration by the Commission over the coming year, which built on the Leader's pledge on peace and security, which was agreed by Conference in September 2016.

Participants felt that ensuring Britain gets the best possible Brexit deal, and dealing effectively with the consequences of leaving the EU, must be the priority for Labour. As well as Brexit, the election of President Trump in the United States meant the future of the transatlantic relationship was a key issue for debate. There was also discussion about how Labour can best defend and advance the UK's proud record on international development.

NPF representatives contributed to a plenary session on Brexit and the implications of the referendum result. The session began with a panel discussion with: Keir Starmer MP; Emily Thornberry MP; Marije Laffeber, Deputy Secretary General of the Party of European Socialists; and Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos Mori. Participants contributed questions and ideas from the floor, before engaging in a series of 16 roundtable discussions, focused on a range of Brexit-related topics, including free movement, international trade and employment protections.

The Commission's work in 2017

The International Policy Commission held its first meeting in early February. Emily Thornberry MP, Nia Griffith MP and Kate Osamor MP gave the Commission an overview of developments in their respective briefs and provided updates on their teams' work since the NPF meeting. Commission members then raised a number of questions and comments relating to Brexit, the Middle East, defence spending, the aid budget and the arms trade.

Drawing on a paper highlighting the conclusions of discussions at the NPF meeting, the Commission

agreed four priority areas for this year's consultation: the post-Brexit relationship with the European Union; the transatlantic relationship; Labour's vision for international development; and Britain's role in promoting peace and tackling conflict. There was agreement that the Commission should hear evidence from a range of experts during the course of the consultation. Following the meeting, a draft consultation document was produced and circulated to Commission members. The Commission met again in late February, where they finalised and agreed the consultation document and drew up a shortlist of potential witnesses to give evidence. They also held a wide-ranging discussion with Keir Starmer MP about Labour's approach to Brexit and the Party's priorities and objectives ahead of the vote on triggering Article 50.

At all meetings the Commission considered the many submissions from members, CLPs and others which had been received via the consultation on the Labour Policy Forum website, including on Labour's Brexit policy, the rights of EU nationals, defence and security, international trade deals, the conflict in Syria and the UK's future role in multilateral institutions.

A third meeting was held in March, with the Commission hearing perspectives from a range of experts on the challenges posed by Brexit and how Labour ought to approach the negotiations. The speakers were: Charles Grant, Director of the Centre for European Reform; Josh Hardie, Deputy Director-General for Policy & Campaigns at the CBI; and Kate Bell, Head of Economic and Social Affairs at the TUC. In particular the session focused on: what priorities Labour should be pressing the Government and our European partners on in the Article 50 negotiations; how Labour can help to shape the best possible Brexit deal; how and in which areas Britain can retain close cooperation with the EU after we leave; and how Labour can ensure that all rights and protections currently underpinned by EU legislation are transposed into UK law.

Labour's Manifesto

Following the announcement of the snap General Election the Commission's policy development process was expedited, with a number of steps taken to draw together the work carried out since

2015. This included the consultation on Britain's defence and security priorities in 2016, the early stages of the 2017 consultation, and a range of seminars and discussions related to Brexit and other key issues. Submissions were received on a range of topics, from members, NGOs, think tanks and trade unions, and were discussed by the Commission during two conference calls in late April.

Brexit

Labour's manifesto position on Brexit made clear that protecting the economy and jobs must be the priority in the Article 50 negotiations. Commitments on seeking to retain the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union, ruling out the possibility of leaving with no deal, and guaranteeing existing rights for all EU nationals living in Britain and vice versa, were all pledges which had been discussed throughout the manifesto process by the Commission. A number of submissions offered suggestions as to how Britain could secure a trading relationship with the EU that is tariff-free, impediment-free and beneficial to all sectors of the economy.

Members of the European Parliamentary Labour Party were closely involved in these discussions. Questions around how to protect employment, consumer and environmental standards, and how to retain close collaboration with the EU in key areas such as security and research were considered over many months, with Labour's MEPs bringing perspectives and insights from Brussels. The Commission and MEPs also discussed the idea that there should be no reduction in funding for regions currently in receipt of EU structural funds as a result of Britain leaving the EU, a commitment which was laid out in the manifesto.

Defence

The manifesto outlined Labour's commitment to a robust, evidence-led defence policy, underpinned by a sustainable British defence sector. This reflected conclusions drawn in the Commission's 2016 consultation, as well as submissions received this year. Commission members discussed defence and security issues on a conference call in April, drawing on what they had heard from party members and from a range of experts. Reflecting these conversations, the manifesto made clear the party's commitment to NATO, the renewal of Trident and to spending at least two

per cent of GDP on defence. An important theme in the manifesto was how to support Britain's Armed Forces, including looking again at the current policies on recruitment, retention and pay restraint.

Diplomacy

A key focus of the manifesto was the importance of putting human rights and conflict resolution at the heart of Labour's foreign policy. Submissions to the Commission supported this approach, and on a conference call in late April Commission members discussed how to build a narrative drawing together Labour's policies in this area. It was agreed that Labour should offer its own vision of a 'Global Britain', in contradistinction to that of the Tories.

The relationship with the United States was a key theme of a number of submissions from members, with views expressed over the current administration's approach to issues such as human rights, refugees and climate change. These concerns, and Labour's alternative approach, were highlighted in the manifesto. The Commission also discussed a number of developing foreign policy challenges, including the fight against Daesh, the fragile situation in Kashmir and the conflict in Yemen. Commission members agreed that the manifesto should highlight Labour's commitment to diplomacy and multilateralism, and commit to greater investment in the UK's diplomatic and consular network.

International development

The manifesto made a number of clear and unequivocal commitments on international development. In the context of a growing assault on the aid budget by the Conservatives, submissions from members and the NGO community repeatedly argued for the 0.7 per cent aid spending commitment to be retained. There was a strong feeling that the manifesto should highlight the importance of sustainable development, and demonstrate strong backing for bolstering health systems, education opportunities, civil society organisations and trade unions. Commission members also felt that the case needs to be made that aid is in the UK's national interest in order to harness greater public support, a view that was reflected in the manifesto.



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Current Issues

Implications of Brexit

The vote to leave the European Union has profound implications not only for Britain's relationship with the EU, but also for the country's wider foreign, defence and development objectives. As such, Brexit was a central issue for the Commission this year. Britain is leaving the EU, but there remains huge uncertainty about whether a deal can be done within two years, and what the future relationship will look like.

Like Britain, the EU faces challenges further afield and the Commission also took a keen interest in this aspect of the debate. Whether in responding to security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa, bringing sanctions and diplomacy to bear on Russia, or leading the fight against climate change, the Commission felt it is important that Brexit does not lead to a diminution of the UK's ability to work with the EU on foreign policy, security and environmental issues.

UK-US relations

Along with deep ties to Europe, Britain's partnership with the US has long served as a key pillar of British foreign policy. With close cooperation on intelligence, diplomacy and counter-terrorism, and as the two biggest spenders on defence in NATO, Britain and the US together play a pivotal role in international security.

Following the referendum result and the election of President Trump the Commission felt that the future shape of the alliance was an important issue for debate. Britain's exit from the EU is already changing the dynamics of the alliance, and the approach taken by the Conservatives towards the new administration has caused concern. Some submissions raised concerns about the President's comments on issues including torture, refugees and NATO, and what the implications of these might be for British foreign policy. While the US is a key ally, the relationship has always been based on shared values, including respect for the rights of women and minorities and a strong commitment to democracy, freedom of the press and the rule of law.

The Middle East

Geopolitical and sectarian rivalries have exacerbated old conflicts and triggered new tensions in several countries in the Middle East. More than six years since the start of the civil war in Syria over 400,000 people have been killed and over 12 million Syrians displaced. Labour has continued to press for the resumption of the Geneva peace talks and for greater international efforts to investigate, prosecute and convict the perpetrators of all war crimes that have taken place during the conflict.

The Commission welcomes the progress that has been made in the fight against Daesh and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, and recognises the work of Britain's armed forces serving their country in those operations. It is important that international support is generated for the strongest possible measures to restrict the flow of funding to Daesh and other terrorist groups.

Yemen faces a growing humanitarian catastrophe, with at least 4,700 civilians killed since the conflict began in March 2015. The country is now on the verge of famine, with almost seven million people severely food insecure. Labour wants to see a full and independent, UN-led investigation into alleged violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen. We support suspending any further arms sales for use in the conflict until that investigation is concluded. This is a subject about which a number of submissions were received by the Commission. More recently, the Commission noted that the wider geopolitics of the Gulf have been further destabilised by the decision by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to cut diplomatic ties with Qatar.

In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Labour is committed to a comprehensive peace based on a two-state solution: a secure Israel alongside a secure and viable state of Palestine. The Commission also discussed the importance for regional security of maintaining the Iran nuclear deal, and of reaching a political solution to the conflict in Libya.

Asia

A number of challenges across Asia continue to be of concern to the Commission. In September 2016 North Korea conducted its fifth nuclear test, followed by a number of missile tests throughout 2017, including a first successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile in July. The human rights situation in the country is of deep concern to the Commission. It is vital that the UK uses its influence at the Security Council to continue holding North Korea to account for its actions, while encouraging a resumption of the six-party talks.

Labour is concerned about recent reports indicating a growing level of intolerance toward political dissent in Hong Kong. We will therefore continue to urge the Chinese authorities to uphold the rights and freedoms protected by the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, and to respect the democratic rights of the people of Hong Kong to determine their future.

Burma has taken some limited steps toward democracy in recent years, and Labour welcomes this progress. However, the transfer of power from the military to the elected civilian government is still far from complete, and in many ways has started to stall. The arrest and indefinite detention of political activists, abuses of ethnic minorities by the Burmese armed forces, and the regime's persistent efforts to crack down on free speech and freedom of the press, are matters of serious concern.

In Kashmir, there has been an upsurge in political tensions and violence over the past year. A number of submissions were received on this topic, and the Commission discussed it throughout the year. For Labour, the over-riding concern is for the human rights and wellbeing of the people of Kashmir. It is vital that all parties to the conflict engage in constructive talks on a peaceful solution, and refrain from violence at all times. India and Pakistan must seek a lasting bilateral resolution to the issue of Kashmir which takes into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Britain's military capabilities

For Labour, the protection of the British people will always come first. The Commission discussed how to ensure that Britain has the necessary defence capabilities to respond to the range of threats that we face.

As several submissions highlighted, the Conservatives' short-sighted cuts and mismanagement of defence projects have led to delays in delivering crucial equipment and gaps in operational capabilities, and have ended up costing the taxpayer more in the long run. Their failure to publish a National Shipbuilding Strategy in the promised timeframe has let down the UK shipbuilding industry.

Labour remains committed to spending at least two per cent of GDP on defence, in accordance with our NATO commitment. The Conservatives have cut the defence budget by 14 per cent since 2010, and despite their pledge before 2010 of "a bigger army for a safer Britain," they have slashed the army from 102,000 in 2010 to just 78,000 today.

Labour believes in taking firm action to deal with the crisis in recruitment and retention that the Conservatives have caused. We support lifting the public sector pay cap to give the Armed Forces Pay Review body the flexibility to set competitive pay rates for Armed Forces personnel. This commitment was supported in a number of submissions.

Labour wants to see greater support given to our service personnel, veterans and Armed Forces families. We fully support the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant, but believe the Government must do more to make sure that it is working effectively across the UK, without any gaps in provision.



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Submissions

All submissions received by the Policy Commission are circulated to members ahead of the next meeting for consideration as part of our discussions on policy development. In 2016-17 the International Policy Commission received and considered submissions on the following topics:

- Aid budget
- Armed Forces
- Army recruitment
- Arms trade
- Brexit
- CETA
- Child refugees
- Climate change
- Colombia
- Commonwealth
- Customs union
- Cyber security
- Daesh
- Defence industry
- Defence review
- Defence spending
- Defence strategy
- Drones
- Euratom
- European Union
- Free movement
- Free trade agreements
- G20
- Global health
- Globalisation
- Human rights
- International development
- Investor State Dispute Settlements
- Israel and Palestine
- Migration
- Military intervention
- Military spending
- Modern slavery
- NATO
- North Korea
- Nuclear deterrence
- Nuclear disarmament
- Overseas aid budget
- Refugee crisis
- Resource scarcity
- Saudi Arabia

- Single market
- South Korea
- Syria
- Terrorism
- THAAD missile defence system
- TTIP
- Trident
- United States
- War crimes
- Yemen