



King's Speech 2024: Foreign affairs and international development

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This research briefing sets out the Labour Party's commitments covering foreign affairs and international development, drawing on its manifesto and other material in the public domain. It has been written in advance of the King's Speech to help members of the House of Lords prepare for the debate on the speech. It does not constitute official information about the government's intentions or provide a complete list of bills to be announced.

I. Labour's manifesto and 'Britain reconnected' agenda

The Labour Party set out its commitments on foreign affairs and international development policy in a chapter of its general election manifesto entitled 'Britain reconnected'.¹

The chapter set out Labour's ambition to "reconnect with allies and forge new partnerships to deliver security and prosperity at home and abroad". It argued that a "strong and connected Britain" was a necessary response to a "more volatile and insecure" world, exemplified by war having returned to Europe, violence in the Middle East, and geopolitical tensions exacerbated by rapid technological change and a changing climate. The manifesto summarised Labour's overall approach for its key foreign policy ambitions as follows:

Our commitment to NATO as the cornerstone of European and global security is unshakeable. We will be confident in our status outside of the EU, but a leading nation in Europe once again, with an improved and ambitious relationship with our European partners. We will once again be a good partner for international development, and a defender of the international rule of law. And we will return to the forefront of climate action by creating the green jobs of the future at home and driving forward the energy transition on the global stage.

¹ Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', 13 June 2024, pp 115–25. See section 3 below for background information on how Labour's foreign affairs policy programme was trailed in earlier speeches and articles.





The chapter included sections on key relationships, security, prosperity, climate leadership, diplomacy and international development. The contents of these are summarised below.

1.1 Rebuilding relationships

This section of the manifesto described the US as an “indispensable ally”. It added that the US-UK ‘special relationship’ was “crucial for security and prosperity” and would transcend “whatever political parties and individuals are in office”. The manifesto pledged continued cooperation with the US on economic, defence and intelligence matters.

It also said Labour would seek to reset the UK-EU relationship, without the UK returning to the single market or the customs union. The manifesto said a Labour government would instead strive to improve the UK-EU trade and investment relationship, for example by negotiating a veterinary agreement, helping touring artists, and seeking mutual recognition agreements for professional qualifications. It added Labour would also pursue an “ambitious new UK-EU security pact”, increased security cooperation with allies France and Germany, and “new bilateral agreements and closer working with Joint Expeditionary Force partners”.²

In addition, this section said multilateral institutions remained “indispensable”, although it argued they were “struggling under the strain of new global challenges”. It said a Labour government would “work with allies to build, strengthen and reform” multilateral institutions, with the UK using its “unique position in NATO, the UN, G7, G20 and the Commonwealth to address the threats we face, and to uphold human rights and international law”. The manifesto also committed the UK to “unequivocally” remain a member of the European Convention on Human Rights.

1.2 Defending the UK’s security

Labour said its “first duty in government will be to keep our country safe”. To this end it pledged to launch a strategic defence review to “assess the threats we face and the capabilities needed to address them”.³

² The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) comprises 10 northern European nations: the UK, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (British Army, [‘Joint Expeditionary Force: A new era of military cooperation’](#), 29 March 2023).

³ For further information on defence-related pledges in the manifesto, including on defence partnerships and domestic initiatives, see House of Lords Library, [‘King’s Speech 2024: Defence’](#), 11 July 2024.



Labour also said the UK's military, financial, diplomatic and political support for Ukraine would "remain steadfast". The party added that it would support efforts to "hold Putin's Russia to account for its illegal war, backing calls for a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression", work with allies to "enable the seizure and repurposing of frozen Russian state assets to support Ukraine", and support a "clear path to NATO membership" for Ukraine.

This section also said a Labour government would:

- work with allies and financial centres to "tackle corruption and money laundering", including in the crown dependencies and overseas territories
- remain "fully committed" to the AUKUS trilateral security partnership with Australia and the US
- conduct an audit of the UK-China relationship, to "improve the UK's capability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities" posed by China
- protect the overseas territories and crown dependencies' sovereignty and right to self-determination, including for the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar

1.3 Championing UK prosperity

In this section Labour said its "first mission in government" would be to grow the UK's economy and that this would be at the "heart of everything we do, including our foreign policy". It added: "We will use our diplomatic network to attract foreign direct investment into the UK, expand markets for British exporters, and shape emerging regulatory frameworks". In support of this aim, Labour said it would seek targeted international trade agreements "aligned with our industrial strategy and economic strengths", publish a trade strategy, and pursue discussions to modernise international trade rules and agreements.⁴

Labour also said it would seek a "new strategic partnership with India, including a free trade agreement, as well as deepening cooperation in areas like security, education, technology and climate change"; pursue deeper cooperation with Gulf partners on regional security, energy and trade and investment; and deliver a "new approach" to political and economic relations with African countries to "foster opportunities for mutual long-term benefit".

⁴ For further information on business and trade-related pledges in the manifesto, see House of Lords Library, ['King's Speech 2024: Economic affairs, business and trade'](#), 11 July 2024.



I.4 Climate leadership

Labour said it would work with international partners on climate action, “especially those at the forefront of the climate crisis, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the COP30 hosts, Brazil”. It also pledged to create a new “clean power alliance” to accelerate the climate transition, enhance clean energy supply chains and lower energy bills for UK consumers.

I.5 Strengthening diplomacy

The manifesto committed Labour to strengthen the UK’s influence abroad, defend the country’s national interests, promote progressive values and protect UK nationals. On the UK’s soft power, for example, the party pledged to work across government to bring leading creative and cultural institutions together to “increase the UK’s international clout”, and with diaspora communities to enhance the UK’s cultural links internationally. The party also promised to introduce a new right to consular assistance in cases of rights violations.

This section of Labour’s manifesto added that the pursuit of long-term peace and security in the Middle East would be an “immediate focus” in office, with the party continuing to push for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza together with the “release of all hostages, the upholding of international law, and a rapid increase of aid”. It added:⁵

Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It is not in the gift of any neighbour and is also essential to the long-term security of Israel. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

I.6 Modernising international development

The manifesto committed a Labour government to “rebuild Britain’s reputation on international development with a new approach based on genuine respect and partnership with the global south to support our common interests”.⁶ It said that “regaining” the UK’s leadership on development was a “key part of our plan to reconnect with our allies and partners”. The party added that it would set a new mission statement for the UK’s

⁵ Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), 13 June 2024, p 124.

⁶ As above, pp 124–5.



development work to “create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet” and restore development spending at 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) “as soon as fiscal circumstances allow”.

2. Recent developments following the general election

Following his appointment as foreign secretary on 5 July 2024, David Lammy reiterated that ‘reconnecting’ the UK in support of security and prosperity would be the new Labour government’s foreign policy priority.⁷

Mr Lammy later said, ahead of visits to Germany, Poland and Sweden that have since taken place, that it was “time to reset” the UK’s relations with Europe, “as a reliable partner, a dependable ally and a good neighbour”.⁸ Mr Lammy said that European security, including continuing support for Ukraine, would be the government’s foreign and defence priority, and repeated that the UK’s commitment to NATO would remain “unshakeable”. Alongside his comments on European security, he added that the new Labour government wanted to “do more together to bring prosperity to our continent”, not only on energy and climate matters, but also on tourism, education exchanges, the arts and sport. He continued:

But if we are to fulfil our ambitions for a reset, we must also improve Britain’s relationship with the European Union. I will be explaining to my new fellow foreign ministers how our new government’s proposal for an ambitious and broad-ranging UK-EU security pact would underpin closer cooperation between us, enshrining a new geopolitical partnership. I also look forward to hearing their ideas for how we can rebuild trust and reset the relationship between the UK and the EU.⁹

Mr Lammy said he looked forward to discussing further cooperation with partners at the next meeting of the European Political Community, which the UK will host on 18 July 2024.¹⁰

⁷ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, ‘[Reconnecting Britain for our security and prosperity: Foreign Secretary David Lammy’s statement](#)’, 6 July 2024.

⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, ‘[It’s time to reset Britain’s relations with Europe: Article by David Lammy](#)’, 7 July 2024.

⁹ Prime Minister Keir Starmer later added that such a pact would be “complementary” to NATO (Politico, ‘[Post-Brexit security pact with EU “will complement” NATO. Starmer says](#)’, 10 July 2024).

¹⁰ For further information, see Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[European Political Community meeting 2024](#)’, accessed 11 July 2024.



In a joint article with Defence Secretary John Healey, Mr Lammy later reiterated that the UK would have a “NATO first” defence strategy and called for “new security and defence agreements with close allies and partners in Europe, such as Germany”.¹¹

3. Origins of Labour’s ‘Britain reconnected’ policy

‘Britain reconnected’ was the theme of a speech delivered by David Lammy, who is now foreign secretary, at an event hosted by the foreign affairs think tank Chatham House in January 2023.¹² In this speech, Mr Lammy argued that the foreign policy priorities of successive Conservative administrations had left the UK “feeling lost and disconnected”.

In response, Mr Lammy said that a Labour government would seek to “take back control” of foreign policy by reconnecting the UK with its allies and partners, would put “pragmatism over ideology” in pursuit of security and prosperity, and would make foreign policy choices for the benefit of the “many, not the few”. Mr Lammy added that a Labour government would announce a “new mission statement” for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to ‘reconnect’ the UK to defend the UK’s security, champion prosperity, and for climate action, international development and diplomacy.

Mr Lammy elaborated on this agenda in response to a statement on the Conservative government’s refreshed integrated review of the UK’s foreign policy in March 2023.¹³ Alongside criticisms of the Conservative Party’s record in government, Mr Lammy praised the updated review’s emphasis on building partnerships and alliances. He said this was “welcome after a period of drift away from multilateralism”, and that the UK was “always a stronger and more effective force for good when it works with others”. He explained this was “why Labour’s foreign policy vision is for a Britain reconnected”.

Also in March 2023, Mr Lammy wrote an article for the Economist newspaper in which he focused on how the UK could ‘reconnect’ with partners, and the United States in particular.¹⁴ He wrote, for example, that Labour backed calls from US senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Jeanne Shaheen for the establishment of a new ‘Transatlantic

¹¹ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Ministry of Defence, ‘[This government will have a ‘NATO first’ defence strategy: Article by the foreign secretary and defence secretary](#)’, 9 July 2024.

¹² Chatham House, ‘[What is Labour’s foreign policy? \(Transcript\)](#)’, 24 January 2023 (see also ‘[What is Labour’s foreign policy? \(Video\)](#)’, 24 January 2023). For a fuller overview of Mr Lammy’s foreign policy outlook, see David Lammy, ‘[Britain reconnected: A foreign policy for security and prosperity at home](#)’, Fabian Society, 28 March 2023. For an earlier outlook, see ‘[In conversation: The UK in the world](#)’, 23 June 2022 (transcript).

¹³ [HC Hansard, 13 March 2023, cols 541–4](#). The integrated review refresh was published on the same day: HM Government, ‘[Integrated review refresh 2023](#)’, 13 March 2023, CP 811.

¹⁴ David Lammy, ‘[David Lammy on bringing Britain back to the world stage](#)’, Economist (£), 18 March 2023.



Anti-Corruption Council'. Mr Lammy also said a Labour government would invite ministers from 'five eyes' and EU partners to London to "develop a common strategy and platform to coordinate how best to [tackle] money laundering, influence-buying and economic crime".¹⁵

In April 2024, Mr Lammy expanded on his vision for UK foreign policy under a Labour government in an article for the US-based Foreign Affairs journal.¹⁶ In particular, he argued that the UK needed to practice "progressive realism" in its approach to foreign policy. Amid comment on a range of foreign policy issues, he said the UK's relationship with both the US and Europe would always be pivotal to its security, and that amid a US pivot to Asia the UK would be "ready for difficult conversations about burden sharing, as long as they are part of a serious process that reinforces collective security". He added that such changes would make it "ever more important that the UK develop closer foreign and security cooperation with the EU". Further to this aim, Mr Lammy advocated for a UK-EU security pact that "drives closer coordination across a wide variety of military, economic, climate, health, cyber, and energy security issues", as well as closer relationships with France, Germany, Ireland, and Poland, including a British-German defence agreement similar to the Lancaster House treaties the UK signed with France in 2010.

Mr Lammy also expanded on his ambitions for the role of the FCDO under a Labour government in a speech delivered at the Institute for Government (IfG) think tank in May 2024.¹⁷ Mr Lammy said that a Labour-run FCDO would become the "international delivery arm of Keir Starmer's missions". This meant ambassadors and embassies would be required to demonstrate how they were delivering economic growth, security and support for the low carbon transition. Mr Lammy added that UK diplomacy would need to "rediscover the art of grand strategy", and that the FCDO would need to make better use of technology in pursuit of its aims and would need to work more openly. He also suggested the FCDO's Diplomatic Academy would be upgraded to a new, cost-neutral "College of British Diplomacy", which would offer courses to international diplomats from friendly countries as well as FCDO staff.

¹⁵ The 'five eyes' pact comprises the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. For further detail on Mr Lammy's anti-corruption ambitions, see IPPR, '[The anti-corruption capital of the world?](#)', accessed 11 July 2024; and '[David Lammy: Kleptocracy speech](#)', 21 May 2024.

¹⁶ David Lammy, '[The case for progressive realism: Why Britain must chart a new global course](#)', Foreign Affairs, 17 April 2024. See also David Lammy, '[Labour's foreign policy will be realistic about us as a nation, not nostalgic about what we used to be](#)', Guardian, 17 April 2024.

¹⁷ Institute for Government, '[Keynote speech: David Lammy MP, shadow secretary of state for foreign, Commonwealth and development affairs](#)', 17 May 2024 (video and audio). [A separate transcript of Mr Lammy's remarks is also available.](#)



4. Selected reaction to Labour's foreign policy ambitions

Writing in May 2024, Tim Durrant, a programme director at the IfG, said Mr Lammy's foreign policy vision was "nothing if not ambitious".¹⁸ However, he added that it left "many of the difficult choices", particularly on defence and development spending, "still to come". Mr Durrant noted that Mr Lammy had set "stretching goals" for FCDO staff, including a new security pact with the EU, reform of the UN, World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and the building of a new clean power alliance. He also observed that a Labour-run FCDO would be pushed to work more closely with partners across Whitehall, while at the same time being more open to input from business, academia and think tanks. Mr Durrant further noted that "much of the detail" of what Labour would do in office would have to wait on the outcome of various reviews. While acknowledging that such a lack of detail was perhaps understandable with a general election looming, he said the FCDO would have its "work cut out" realising Mr Lammy's policy ambitions should Labour win power.

On the new Labour government's proposals for closer cooperation with the EU, the UK in a Changing Europe think tank observed during the general election campaign that the "scope to significantly deepen relations is quite limited as long as the UK chooses to remain outside the single market and customs union".¹⁹ It added: "Even in areas like defence, where there is a clear mutual interest in enhanced cooperation, the EU's unwillingness to offer 'bespoke' deals to third countries greatly constrains what is possible". In an earlier report, the think tank had noted there appeared to be scope for a new UK-EU relationship. But it added that the EU "sees the ball as being 'in the UK's court' to push for closer cooperation".²⁰

Writing for Chatham House on the day of Mr Lammy's appointment as foreign secretary, Bronwen Maddox, the institute's director and chief executive, and Olivia O'Sullivan, director of the institute's 'UK in the world' programme, argued there was "little difference between most elements of Labour and Conservative foreign policy".²¹ However, they added that "early decisions" would "set the tone" for the Labour government's approach to the UK's place in the world and "begin to fill in the questions carefully left blank in the campaign". Ms O'Sullivan had earlier written that there was a "mismatch" between the risks described in manifestos, including Labour's, and the "solutions and resources set out" to tackle them.²²

¹⁸ Tim Durrant, '[David Lammy has high ambitions for the FCDO](#)', Institute for Government, 17 May 2024.

¹⁹ UK in a Changing Europe, '[UK-EU relations 2024](#)', 18 June 2024, p 72.

²⁰ UK in a Changing Europe, '[UK-EU foreign, security and defence cooperation](#)', 27 March 2024.

²¹ Bronwen Maddox and Olivia O'Sullivan, '[Can Labour improve Britain's place in the world?](#)', Chatham House, 5 July 2024. For further analysis, see Chatham House, '[United Kingdom](#)', '[UK's global role](#)' and '[UK in the world programme](#)', accessed 11 July 2024.

²² Olivia O'Sullivan, '[UK election manifestos make promises on security and foreign policy, but tough choices await a new government](#)', Chatham House, 20 June 2024.

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