



HOUSE OF LORDS

International
Relations
Committee



The House of Lords is an essential part of the UK Parliament. Its committees investigate public policy, proposed laws and government activity. The remit of the International Relations Committee is ‘to consider the United Kingdom’s international relations’.

Background and role

Why it was set up

The committee was reappointed on 27 June 2017 to consider the UK’s international relations. The appointment of the committee followed a recommendation from the House of Lords Liaison Committee in its October 2015 report, which was agreed by the House in November 2015.

What it does

It investigates public policy areas related to international relations.

How it does its work

The committee decides subjects to investigate and takes evidence from individuals, organisations and government ministers to gather material for its reports. Using the evidence gathered, the reports provide analyses of the issues and make recommendations to government and others for change.



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Membership

The committee benefits from the experience of its 12 members with backgrounds in foreign affairs, industry, politics and academia.



International Relations Committee chairman
Lord Howell

Members

Lord Howell of Guildford (chairman)

Former secretary of state for transport and energy and former minister of state at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

Former minister for international development and the Foreign Office

Baroness Coussins

Adviser on corporate responsibility

Lord Grocott

Former MP and former chief whip in the House of Lords

Lord Hannay of Chiswick

Former ambassador to the UN and EU

Baroness Helic

Former senior special adviser to the foreign secretary

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon

Former commander of the Metropolitan Police

Lord Jopling

Former minister of state for agriculture, fisheries and food

Lord Purvis of Tweed

Former MSP

Lord Reid of Cardowan

Former home secretary and former secretary of state for defence

Baroness Smith of Newnham

European politics academic

Lord Wood of Anfield

Chair of the United Nations Association (UK)

Investigations and reports

Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa is undergoing a period of revolutionary change. A transformation of power is catalysing radical changes to the order and organisation of the region. It is challenging to forecast how the region might evolve, but it is likely to be unstable, suffer from high levels of violence, and constitute an ongoing challenge to policy makers. They will have to be prepared to take account of power structures, outside the traditional ones of governments.

Reshaping policy

'The Middle East: Time for New Realism' was published in May 2017 after evidence was taken from a range of international and UK-based witnesses. It explores the transformation of power, which is disrupting the whole region, and calls for a reshaping of UK policy.

It recommends that the UK should recognise there can no longer be automatic reliance on American leadership, or the direction of its policy. It also says the UK should work on rapprochement with Iran following the nuclear deal and that relying on Saudi assurances about their use of UK arms exports is not adequate.



The report explores:

- the transformed context of the region
- British policy positions
- transformative shifts in social change, communications and demography
- role of external powers
- evolution of Middle East states
- power beyond the state
- trade and economic policy
- future British policy requirements and trends.

The UK and the Future of the Western Balkans

The committee investigated the UK's relationship with the Balkans, with particular focus on the UK's approach to the region beyond Brexit. Its January 2018 report called on the government to sustain and develop involvement in the Western Balkans, regardless of Brexit.

UK commitment after Brexit

The UK has a long history of engagement in the region and the committee argued it must continue because it is in the UK's interest to sustain commitments to the Western Balkans and, more broadly, to European security after Brexit. It recognised the government hosting the Western Balkans Summit later in 2018 was an encouraging sign.

The Western Balkans has made significant progress in the last 20 years. But with the potential for renewed dangers, both within and outside the area, the committee said there is no room for complacency from the UK or its international partners. While the immediate danger of all-out conflict is remote, it highlighted that the lack of political progress, deep problems of nationalism, failure to face up to the past and endemic corruption make the region prone to insecurity.

Report observations and recommendations:

- Strong UK involvement in the region must continue, in the national interest and as part of its continued commitment to European security and close cooperation with other EU states.
- Brexit is having an impact in the region, to counter it will require a strong re-affirmation of British commitment.
- The UK's coordinated and consistent engagement must be sustained along with its international partners, to protect the progress made since the 1990s wars. UK also needs to look for new ways of coordinating and cooperating with the EU.
- The committee agreed with the government's support for region's countries aiming to gain NATO and EU membership, and efforts to overcome the obstacles to those aims.
- The clearly destabilising influences of outside powers in the region, notably Russia, must be firmly and persistently countered.
- The domestic priorities for countries in the region, which the UK must support, include entrenching strong institutions of democracy, combatting state capture and restrictions on the freedom of expression, tackling organised crime and corruption, managing migration through and from the region, and creating welcoming business environments.

"The UK must continue to engage with partners in the EU and internationally to promote stability and democratic reform in the Western Balkans; that is in everyone's interests. We welcome the government's decision to host the Western Balkans Summit and will look to it as a symbol of the commitment of the government to the region even after the UK leaves the EU."

Lord Howell of Guildford, chairman



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