

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss: Building the Network of Liberty

The world is moving very fast, and ideas are moving even faster.

This revolution is why we enjoy incredible freedom, powered by free enterprise and technology. Our businesses are driving the Covid recovery; our scientists are saving the world through their miracle vaccines; and we're vaccinating the British population in record time.

Yet this progress shouldn't blind us to the pitfalls.

Hostile forces are using disinformation to undermine truth. Extremists are perpetuating malign ideologies through social media. Autocratic regimes are using this maelstrom of militancy, mistrust and misinformation to gain the upper hand.

Now is the time for the free world to fight back, and to use the power of economics and technology to promote freedom not fear.

Age of introspection

Let's be honest: in recent years, the free world has taken its eye off the ball.

After the collapse of communism, many breathed a sigh of relief and called it the end of history – confident that freedom and democracy would inexorably go global under its own steam.

Societies turned inwards. Rather than engaging with the big ideas shaping the world, failed ideas ran rife, like the post-modern philosophy that there is no objective truth.

In fashionable circles, people talked about how we should be ashamed of our history and doubtful about our future.

There was strategic drift. Defence spending fell. Countries became strategically dependent on cheap gas, or reliant on others for vital technology like 5G.

This complacency is being exploited by those who never stopped fighting the global battle of ideas. They've been relentlessly building their influence – offering a quick buck to anyone who would take it, with strings attached for sovereignty and national security.

It's time to wake up. The free world's age of introspection must end now.

Instead we need the age of ideas, influence and inspiration.

And that's why Britain is determined to work with our friends to form a

network of liberty that spans the world.

As JFK put it, we will inspire others “not with an imperialism of force or fear, but the rule of courage and freedom, and hope for the future of man.”

Britain taking the lead

We know we will succeed because we are free and democratic nations. We believe in individual liberty and humanity and dignity, and the power of people – the greatest transformative force on earth.

This is what our adversaries always get wrong. They put groups ahead of individuals. They want to make people work for the system. We want to make the system work for people.

We know that when people have agency over their own lives, when they have freedom and opportunity, they achieve incredible things.

This is the principle our country is based on – you can see it in the advancement of rights under Magna Carta, the establishment of the rule of law, or the pioneering of free market economics – all ideas that inspired the world.

So it's time to be proud of who we are and what we stand for. It's time to dump the baggage holding us back. Our history – warts and all – makes us what we are today.

Britain is the greatest country on earth. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, you can achieve your dreams.

And that's why when I speak to foreign governments and businesses, they want to work with Britain. In my 12 weeks as Foreign Secretary, we've already secured partnership agreements with 7 countries – from Greece to Israel to Malaysia.

People want to do business with Britain. They trust us. And they see things in Britain they would like for their own countries.

They see that in Britain your background is no barrier to becoming a chief executive, a top footballer, or the mayor of London.

They recognise we are a science and tech superpower, home to the third largest number of tech unicorns in the world.

They know that we are an economic powerhouse, growing faster than any other G7 nation.

From the Beatles to Sarah Gilbert to Tim Berners-Lee, we have unrivalled influence in the world.

So our foreign policy will project pride in our country and in all its elements, including our great cities, our towns and our countryside. Whether by promoting our manufacturing, from Sunderland's electric cars to Derby's

small modular nuclear reactors. Or by bringing the world to Glasgow for COP26 – which took a historic step forward in tackling climate change. Or by bringing the G7 to Liverpool this weekend – a city whose global influence in culture, sport and music is stronger than ever.

A stronger Foreign Office

We have so much to be proud of. So I am putting this at the heart of the Foreign Office's mission – to go out there, influencing and inspiring others to join our cause.

The Office itself is a national asset. We have the best diplomats in the world, and a diplomatic network with unique reach and expertise. It represents us across 180 countries, speaking 46 different languages – everything from Albanian to Urdu.

The Henry Jackson Society's league table ranks the UK as the second most powerful country on the globe, precisely because of our diplomatic clout.

We are united with our friends and family through the Commonwealth, covering a third of the world's population. And our diplomatic heft has been shown time and time again.

After the Salisbury attack, we worked with 27 other countries to lead the largest collective expulsion of Russian diplomats in foreign history.

We were the first European country to impose sanctions on Belarus.

And only last weekend, we lifted the US's decades-long ban on British lamb.

So we will keep increasing our reach and strengthening our network. I've just cut the ribbon on new embassy buildings in Mexico City and Bangkok.

And our formidable diplomatic machine will be put to work, relentlessly promoting Britain.

Our diplomats will go out there in a positive, proud and patriotic spirit. We won't lecture others, instead we will lead by example. We won't hang-wring, instead we will reach out with our ideas and inspiration.

We will be unashamedly commercial, hosting businesses delegations from our cities across the UK, and paving the way towards new trade, tech and security agreements which will help level up our country – from Govan to Gloucester.

And I, as Foreign Secretary, will empower the men and women across our embassies and high commissions with everything they need to go out there.

Winning the battle for economic influence

Because we need to be on the front foot with our friends across the free world, because the battle for economic influence is already in full flow.

China now spends over twice as much on development finance as the US. 44 low

and middle income countries have debts to Beijing in excess of 10% of their GDP.

The EU relies on Russia for over 40% of its gas – and with some countries, Russia has had a complete monopoly of supply. If Russia gets its way, Europe will be increasingly hooked on its gas.

We have to end this strategic dependency, whether it's on energy, investment or technology. We have to provide an alternative.

And that means stepping up our engagement and our investment –it means shaping the economy, including the next wave of technology like quantum computing, 6G, artificial intelligence and much more.

And the United Kingdom is in a unique position to lead the charge on this.

After almost fifty years in the EU, once again all the levers of international policy are in our hands – diplomacy, development, trade and security.

It's a new opportunity for the UK to shape the international agenda. An unfrozen moment that we must capitalise on.

As an outward-looking, sovereign nation, we are rebuilding our muscle to fulfil the promise of Global Britain – ready to win opportunities for our country and win the future for freedom.

Our adversaries seek to use economics and technology as tools of control. We want to use them as tools of liberation. And we will use all of Britain's influence, ideas and inspiration to achieve this.

Investment, trade and development

Firstly, we are reaching out to build new economic partnerships.

Following our free trade agreements with 70 countries plus the EU, my successor Anne Marie Trevelyan is pursuing a trade deal with India and accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And those will mean that two thirds of our trade is covered by trade deals.

We are also building new partnerships with low and middle income countries. We've launched British International Investment – our honest, reliable alternative, providing infrastructure finance and support for the green transition.

The BII will help to deliver £8 billion a year in UK-backed financing by 2025, up from £1.5 billion last year. We will leverage the firepower of the City of London. For the first time, we will be supporting projects in South East Asia and the Caribbean, as well as Africa – drawing them closer to major free-market democracies, like the UK.

And early next year, I will be launching our new development strategy.

Alongside our new approach on investment, it will focus on providing women and girls with the freedom they need to succeed. It will commit us to stepping up our response to humanitarian crises around the world. And it will ensure our development policies support our belief in freedom and democracy.

Tech leadership

Second, as a science and tech superpower we will make sure that the free world leads the way in the technologies of the future.

We are joining forces with our friends to win supremacy in areas like quantum, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and more.

We are forging new partnerships with fellow tech powerhouses like India, Indonesia and Israel.

We have a crack team of tech experts driving this forward in more than 40 diplomatic posts across the globe.

And we are working with our friends to set the standards in tech – from intellectual property to the free flow of data.

This is just a glimpse of what is to come.

We are negotiating new tech partnership with the US. We're in talks with Singapore and more. And in the New Year, I will set out a new approach for the UK's tech leadership on the global stage.

Security and defence partnerships

Thirdly, all of this has to be underpinned by stronger security ties.

We are building a network of security partnerships to protect our people, our partners and our freedoms, including on the high seas.

We are forging cyber security partnerships with allies around the world, from ASEAN to India, to Canada and more.

And we are building our traditional security capabilities, with the largest rise in the defence spending for a generation. We are putting our money where our mouth is by devoting over 2% of our GDP to defence, making us Europe's largest NATO contributor.

We are steadfast in NATO, the 5 Eyes intelligence partnership, and the Five Power Defence Arrangements, with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore.

At the same time, we are going further and faster in other areas – such as our new AUKUS partnership. By joining forces with the US and Australia, we are protecting sea routes and stability across the Indo-Pacific. And we are deepening our work Canada to cover regions such as the Arctic and beyond.

We are working to advance our interests from a position of strength.

Last week I visited our troops in Estonia and joined NATO foreign ministers in Riga. Together we will send a clear message that any incursion by Russia into Ukraine would be a strategic mistake. As President Biden said, there would be “very real costs” to pay.

We stand with Ukraine in supporting their security and defence, and helping them become more energy independent. Later today, I will be meeting my Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba to strengthen our ties further.

We will also work night and day to prevent the Iranian regime from ever getting a nuclear weapon. And we will continue to work with our partners to respond to the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

Network of Liberty – call to action

In all of these areas – and more – we are taking the lead, we’re seizing the initiative and we’re standing up for freedom and democracy.

We are using all of our weight as the world’s fifth largest economy: British International Investment, leadership in technology, increased defence spending, and new, deeper trade deals.

We are getting out there to build the network of liberty and advance the frontiers of freedom.

And I’m delighted to see that our friends are stepping up too. Japan has just appointed an economic security minister – and they are developing new technology like 6G. Australia is building trade and security links around the world.

I want to see all our allies step up and seize this moment. I want to see all freedom-loving nations calling time on introspection, protectionism, and isolationism.

When we put freedom first, we all benefit.

The more freedom-loving countries trade with each other, build security links, invest in our partners and pull more countries into the orbit of freedom, the safer and freer we all are.

New agreements between like-minded countries, even when you’re not part of them, are there to be celebrated.

It isn’t a zero-sum game. Friends want friends to be successful.

When the US works on a new economic partnership with Japan, as Ambassador Tai has been doing with Minister Hayashi, or when the EU announces its new Global Gateway scheme to invest in developing countries, we all benefit.

But we need to go further – I want to see our partners stepping up in funding NATO, cutting strategic dependence on Russian gas, putting more investment into developing countries, joining CPTPP, and challenging malign acts.

The G7 covers half of global GDP – and even more with our friends across the world, including ASEAN. By joining forces and bringing other freedom-loving nations with us, we will create the future we all want to see.

Conclusion

So when I meet the G7 in Liverpool this weekend, my message will be clear: it's time to get on the front foot and join us in advancing the frontiers of freedom.

It is time to dump the baggage, ditch the introspection and step forward, proud of who we are and what we stand for, ready to shape the world anew.

Let's stop fighting about the past. Let's start fighting for the future.

By championing our ideas, building our influence and inspiring others with our cause, we can forge ahead as a global network of liberty.

That's how we will rise to the challenge in this fast-changing world. It's how we'll win the battle for ideas and influence once again. And it's how we'll ensure free societies and democracies don't just survive, they thrive.

Thank you.