

Speech by the Foreign Secretary : Summary

The Foreign Secretary set out his interpretation of our new strategic framework, highlighting the importance of the network and the services we deliver, and the need for the FCO to be more confident about leading the UK's foreign policy. He emphasised the presumed competence of HOMs and highlighted his confidence that the UK should serve as a 'global hub'.

'Old diplomacy' still plays a key role, he acknowledged, but we also need to think more about 'New Diplomacy', working with new actors and using new tools (eg, the internet). And we need to sell ourselves better both at home and abroad.

The Foreign Secretary concluded his session by awarding the FCO's first Leadership Awards to Harriet Fear, UKTI Sectors Group, Vinay Talwar, Second Secretary in Guatemala City and Horacio Licon, Deputy Head of Commercial Section in Mexico City.

Main points

- The FS noted that the distribution of power is changing: from west to east (economically and politically), from state to individual – in what he called the 'civilian surge', and from national to international. Within this, Britain is moving from Atlantic bridge to global hub.
- He gave his assessment of our strengths: knowledge; pride; sense of public service; commitment; and seriousness of purpose. He also highlighted where we still need to improve: developing a better collective memory; giving HOMs a greater role in policy; encouraging a culture of creativity and challenge; and thinking about vision and strategy as well as tactics.
- Our powers of influence and persuasion need to be deployed not just abroad, not just within government, but also more widely in the UK. To make foreign policy work we have to carry our citizens with us. The FS urged diplomats to 'bring foreign policy back home'.
- He urged that we continue to focus on the "who we are, where we are, what we are and how we do it" (as set out by James Bevan) and called for increased transparency and openness about what we do, something that he has already started through his blog
- The FS praised locally engaged staff for their contributions to the FCO's work.
- On the Commonwealth, the FS highlighted its unique strengths and his strong belief that it could become the world's first network organisation that really works.

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