

Why British foreign policy will not change

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Lord Chris Patten, Chancellor of Oxford University

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Lord Chris Patten discusses the foreign policy of the European Community with respect to multilateralism and the RtoP.

(...) What should the main role of [Europe's] foreign policy? Most problems we face require global co-operation, from the drug trade (that threatens to wreck Mexico) to terrorism (incubated in the world's failed states). This sort of co-operations is usually multi-lateralism and is institutionalised through the UN and its associated bodies.

Without resiling from the job of trying to reform the UN, its is not unfair to note that it is better at normative diplomacy than at launching action on the ground. It overwhelmingly endorsed the principle of Responsibility to protect (to prevent atrocities) in 2005 but has been paralysed when political and diplomatic intervention has been required, for example to protect Tamil civilians in the Sri Lankan government campaign to wipe out the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Moises Naim, Foreign Policy editor-in-cheif, has argued that most problems today require mini-lateralist not multi-lateralist solutions; smaller groups of countries come together to solve them rather than trying to mobilise all 192 UN members. This is true of the Group of 20 leading nations (which we should aim to link institutionally with the Bretton Woods institutions). It is likely to be true of nuclear proliferation and Iran. It is also true of terrorism and the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mini-lateralism will be required in Sudan, Congo and elsewhere. The aim of our foreign policy should be to place ourselves near the heart of this mini-lateralist process, invariably with like-minded European partners. Whether we can do that will depend heavily on the success of our economic policy.

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