



A Conversation with Ambassador Karen Pierce: Is Britain Still a Global Power?

TRANSCRIPT

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Ben Judah:

Hello and welcome. My name is Ben Judah. I'm a research fellow at the Hudson Institute and the author of, most recently, *This is London*. It's my great pleasure to talk today with Dame Karen Pierce, DCMG, Britain's new ambassador to Washington. Karen was previously the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York. And it's a great pleasure to have her here today.

Dame Karen Pierce:

Thank you.

Ben Judah:

Thanks so much. I think it'd be great if we kick off with the big question of this session, which is the title of this event, which is, is Britain still a global power?

Dame Karen Pierce:

Yes, we are. Why are we? Well, we were global power before we joined the European Union. And now that we've left it, a lot of those constants are still with us and we've added new ones. So one constant is that we're a permanent five member on the Security Council. We're also a nuclear weapons power as stipulated by the nonproliferation treaty. We have the Commonwealth, which is a global network of shared history, shared legal experiences, shared goals.

And in addition, one of the new elements is that we're now the sixth-largest economy in the world and despite COVID, the fundamentals of that aren't going to change. And we also are a major aid donor. We spend 0.7% of GDP on official development assistance, one of the very few top tier economies to do so.

Ben Judah:

But surely Britons would say that only the US or China are global powers in the 21st century.

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think it would be fair to say that Britain is not a great power at the level of the US or China, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise. But we still are a global power because we have global reach in our defense and our diplomacy and our economy. So I agree. I would make a distinction between US and China on the one hand, and obviously the economic might of those two countries is indisputable. But I would still claim that for the reasons I say, we retain our P5 membership, we retain our nuclear position. We too are a global power, if not at the level of the US and China.

Ben Judah:

When discussing Britain's global role, there's often a tendency to talk about Britain now compared to the British Empire or Britain before World War II, which seems a little silly to me given how much time has elapsed. But I'd like to ask you a more unusual question, which is, how different do you think Britain's role in 2020 is to Britain's role in 1990?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think that's a really interesting question and I'd agree with you Ben. We don't want to go back to the early part of the 20th century. It's an important part of the history, but it's over now. In 1990, we were still in the European Union. We were working hard with the French and others on the emerging Balkans crisis. I think it's fair to say that for the first part of the 1990s, Europe did not do as well as it could have done on the Balkans crisis to put it stronger.

Now I think we've learned the lesson of those crises. We're better ready to respond. We've taken action with the Americans and French in Syria over chemical weapons. I think without getting into detailed analysis of the figures, I think I'd also say that we're stronger economically, notwithstanding current COVID problems. We've had a good period of growth. We've got very good employment rates. We are very much an advocate for free trade around the world and we try and put our money where our mouth is, by paying development assistance so other developing countries can bring up their economic and trade standards.

And as I say, we now have this 0.7% of GDP, development assistance, which I think is very important. We're playing a leading role on climate. We're putting our shoulders to the wheel on some of the big foreign policy issues of the day, like the Yemen conflict. So we are trying to be what the foreign secretary calls an active force for good in the world.

Ben Judah:

So did you think that Britain is more or less influential than it was in 1990 or maybe about the same?

Dame Karen Pierce:

That's a good question. I would say a little bit more. We've left the European Union, so our global reach is our own. When we finish the implementation period we will be able to adopt our own sanctions, our own standards. And that in turn will make other countries look at us a little bit differently. There'll be different partnerships to be done, alongside the very important ones we already have. We're playing a deeper role in NATO. We sit on the committee that's looking at new issues for NATO. So I would say that we're on a trajectory to be more influential.

Ben Judah:

Looking at the world today, where do you think Britain is sort of leading and changing the world in regions or sectors or with its ability to set or influence global norms?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think in several areas we are one of the few countries who are unapologetically in favor of open and free trade, and I think that's going to be even more important post-COVID and as we get into economic recovery. We play a major role on tackling climate change through things like green financing, new ways of doing finance indeed, promoting biodiversity. We're going to chair with Italy COP26 [United Nations Climate Change Conference] next year, hopefully taking the Paris agreement to new levels.

We've played a very active role in Yemen. We're not there yet as I think everybody would admit, but we are supporting the UN and others as we try and bring peace and a political settlement, to

stop the fighting and also get more humanitarian aid in. We play a very important role around the world on humanitarian assistance, when there are natural and other disasters and we have tried very hard to put a lot of money and be very active on global health. Even before COVID-19, we were a major player through such things as the international campaign on antimicrobial resistance. And I think once COVID-19 is over, that scenario we'll need to come back to.

Ben Judah:

Fascinating. What did your role at the UN teach you about British influence? How has your perspective on British diplomacy and how Britain can influence these key issues been impacted by being sort of the permanent representative to the United Nations?

Dame Karen Pierce:

One of the things that surprised me, and we were talking earlier about the 20th century, is how there are still some enduring images of Britain among some of our friends at the UN. And even among those who might not think like us, there are some enduring images. And the most enduring image is one of Britain being pro the rule of law, pro good governance and pro justice. And I would hear that time and time again, echoed by a whole number of countries.

One of the best things, perhaps one of the countries on the Security Council who we hardly ever agreed with said to me, "I often disagree with you Karen. But I really like the fact that you stand up for the rule of law, that's a very British thing to do and you listen to what I have to say and you're very respectful. And I think that too is a British thing to do." And I thought coming from this particular ambassador who, we hardly ever agreed on anything, that really was quite a good tribute.

And it got me thinking about what is it at the United Nations that is the brand that Britain brings to global diplomacy. And I think he was spot on. We don't always get it right. We're happy to talk about that. But I think in general, the enduring qualities of this respect for the rule of law, good governance, human rights and tolerance, wanting to listen to others' points of view.

Ben Judah:

Will you tell us which country the diplomats came from?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I'll tell you it was in Latin America, but I don't think it would be fair to him to say exactly who it was because I haven't asked his permission.

Ben Judah:

We talked about where Britain is influential and what Britain is about, but often I found in my research that effectiveness in foreign policy is also about what you prioritize, about what you've decided to downgrade or what you're not putting first. So what are Britain's key priorities for you and for the British government of course, over the next few years?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think particularly, Boris Johnson and Dominic Robb have made this clear. Climate is very important to us. Free trade is very important to us. And trying to make a contribution to bring the really big and serious conflicts to an end like Syria, like Libya, like Yemen. We know those are terribly difficult. We've all been trying, but if you like too long to try and do something about those conflicts. But we are determined to keep trying and to try and bring people together.

And at the same time, I think we really want to invest in human rights and rule of law. The foreign secretary, Dominic Robb, talks in terms of things we have to do in the world to react to events. And that obviously drives policy day-to-day. But then there's space that is there any way and we can carve out to make bigger about what do we want to do proactively. And he talks very much about being a force for good in the world. And it comes down to rule of law and human rights, climate change at the moment and definitely free trade.

Ben Judah:

I often like to ask myself, how long can we go in conversation about Britain without using the word Brexit. I hate to ask you, how do you think the world sees Brexit, not how the Brits of course see Brexit?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think the first point to make is that Brexit is over now. It's yesterday's word. We're now out of the EU and there's a different relationship between the UK and the EU as you know. I think the world sees Brexit to be honest in a number of different ways. For some countries it was almost irrelevant to the way they see Britain and the way they see geopolitics. So some of those countries put a very high premium on trade with us, with Britain, and what they want to know is, are we going to be a good reliable trading partner. And from that perspective, whether we're in or outside the EU is a bit less relevant to them.

Other people think outside the EU, Britain will be a better trading partner. We'll be able to do more deals, we'll be able to do even faster, we'll be able to accept more trade-offs than we might've been able to within the EU. And some people have come knocking on the government, still saying "let's do a trade deal." And then I think you have some people, including in America, who think that supranational institutions are not as important as national sovereignty.

So there's a more, if you like, ideological approach from some people here to the concept of leaving an organization like the EU. And then I think in all honesty you do have some Americans and others, who are very affectionate towards multilateral institutions and who do want reassurance that although Britain's left the EU, we haven't left the world stage, we haven't given up on a good relationship with Europe and we are still going to be a partner that really cares about the way the world works and wants to cooperate with others to try and make it better. And that sounds a bit corny but I think that's all true and that's exactly where we are. We've left the European Union, we've not left Europe. We want to be an independent active force for good.

Ben Judah:

I'd like to ask you a little bit more about the world of Brexit. I'm going to say, the process of resetting the European Union and in terms of trade and diplomacy, how is that seen in Washington? What's your experience so far?

Dame Karen Pierce:

People are interested across Democrats and Republicans. They'd like to know, as I said, that we are really going to be engaged but it's not a retreat. And I think we can give them that assurance. A number of people in the administration and on the Hill are very interested in starting free trade negotiations with us, and that's something we're very keen to do. As you know we've already started negotiating the free trade agreement with all the arrangements that will lead to the future arrangements, trade arrangements with the European Union. And then I think there's something very important about values. Both sides here want to know that we are still a tolerant, open, democratic country, who's a reliable ally. And I think our role, Britain's role in NATO is very important in that respect.

Ben Judah:

What's your sense on Britain's future free trade agreement with the European Union? There've been a lot of signals and discussions about that over the last few days.

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, we're now in a number of rounds with them and the dates for those have been published. And then there's David Frost who is our chief negotiator and a strong EU expert and trade expert. David said publicly that they will take stock in June of the progress made. So that's what we're looking forward to now, a series of rounds, many of which are done virtually and then taking stock in June.

Ben Judah:

I think we can often get a little too stuck in the weeds with this discussion about Britain's process of resetting after the European Union. But what do you think, the UK relationship with the EU will look like in 2030? So far ahead, after this process is over, what's the end state that the British government is seeking between ourselves and our continental neighbors?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think 10 years is a very long time in international politics. And who knows what events might intervene. And if we get another event of the nature of pandemic, then things might look very different. But I do see, and this is just my personal analogy, I do see something of a tripod with the EU, Britain and the United States, more or less on track to promote free trade, tolerance, democratic values, against a world that is changing and is shifting as we have a more assertive China and more aggressive Russia, a new economies and new powers coming onto the world stage.

And I don't mean to imply that I'm hunkering after a previous era, just that I think there is something quite important about the western liberal democratic model. And it's important for prosperity, as well as for security. So I hope that by 2030, we will all be in a very good rhythm of cooperating on things, on public policy, including pandemics, on security, including new technology, new weapons systems, and also on the things that have bound us together in the first place, human rights and democracy.

Ben Judah:

During your previous role in Geneva and experience with working with the World Trade Organization, I'd love to hear more about what you think that process will look like, the Britain rebuilding its free trade networks. One question that has been posed to me, and I know people are interested in, in Washington is, will Britain seek to join groups like the Asian TPP, free trade agreement?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think it's possible to look at that in a number of ways. One of the interesting things about Geneva Paris that you have the traditional UN, if I can put it that way, right alongside the World Trade Organization and many of the ambassadors like me are the same ambassadors in each organization. But the minute you go into the World Trade Organization, you go into its meeting rooms, there's a different atmosphere and I think there's a different atmosphere because you're dealing with real world economic livelihoods.

You're dealing with decisions that have a financial penalty or benefit. So there's a grittiness to negotiations that isn't always there on the UN side. We now have another ambassador there who's taking forward the UK's independent trade policy once the implementation period with the EU is over. But we are very much open and hope to join the comprehensive and progressive transpacific partnership.

We're very interested in being as receptive as possible to plurilateral arrangements as well, and to try and take some of those forward. When I was in Geneva, there were agreements on intellectual property. There was the Bali trade agreement, which was the first multilateral trade agreement in some 25 years. So there've been these slow measures to try and get the world trade system going to gain.

We also have to think about reform of the World Trade Organization itself. It's been a very good organization. It's done great things, but it probably now needs to adapt to the circumstances of the 21st century. So there's a lot to do on the trading agenda, but I think we as Britain really want to be at the heart of that. We're historically maritime trade, so we've been a very prominent free-trading nation. We haven't always been free trade supporters, but certainly in recent decades, recent centuries we have.

Ben Judah:

So now to bring things back to Washington and ask you a question, which I think all British ambassadors get asked at some point which is, what is still special about the special relationship, especially when the United States has other special relationships like the one with Israel or the one with Canada or Mexico?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I certainly don't want to pretend that we're not well aware that we have to keep working at this relationship. We're not complacent. It's a huge honor to be here in Washington, but it is a relationship that is very strong, particularly since the second World War, and we need to keep it as strong as it has been and take it to new areas. I think it's special, precisely because of its depth and breadth, and the number of areas of government and social policy that are involved, whether it's intelligence, it's defense, it's investment, it's trade, it's science, it's medicine.

And then there are all the public aspects of that where people-to-people links are very strong. But few universities, obviously through language, obviously through shared culture. There are school exchanges. So I think what's particularly special about it is the sheer range of what it covers. It's classic enduring nature, it's a deep, profound, successful, relationship that has been able to withstand individual policy disagreements.

Ben Judah:

You have recently had some bumps. So I'm curious to know what lessons do you think can be learned from the Kim Darroch affair?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think that was a sad affair. I worked with Kim Darroch a lot. I worked for Kim Darroch a number of times. He's an outstanding diplomat. People shouldn't leak government documents. I mean, I'm sure you'd expect me to say that, but there's a reason why government documents are protected and the person who chose to leak Kim's letters, wasn't serving the cause of Anglo-American relations quite apart from the fact that they weren't respecting the confidentiality of those exchanges.

I think in general terms, this is a relationship that we need to make sure we take to the next level. And by that I mean two things principally. There's a whole generation of Americans who unlike some of their predecessors, don't have a connection to the UK or to Europe, and they don't have some of the shared experiences that characterized Anglo-American or American European relations in the second half of the 20th century.

So it's my job, I see it as my job to explain to those people, why Britain is interested in America, and why Britain is an interesting place for them to think about, vice versa for generations of younger Brits. And then I think on the new technology side, there's something very important about the way science and technology is developing at the moment in quite a disruptive way. And perhaps this is also an answer to your question, about 2030.

So we have new technology like cyber, like artificial intelligence. How are we going to make sure that we respond to these challenges in the way that we in America were able to respond to say the nuclear challenges thrown up by nuclear technology in the 1950s. And I do think it's not an exaggeration to say that this new technology, might ultimately have the transformative effect on both our societies that nuclear technology had back then.

And I'd like us together to do quite a lot of work on working that through, working out what the strategic competition dimension of that is, working out what effect it has on people's lives, what effect it has on our competitiveness, what effect it has on our scientific research.

Ben Judah:

And in terms of the embassy of the institution or the ambassadors craft, how have you handled change in British diplomacy in Washington?

Dame Karen Pierce:

That's interesting. When I was here 25 years ago, somebody had just published something saying ambassadors were like sailing ships, i.e obsolete. And then there was a favorite quote of

everybody's, which came from Dr. Kissinger, whereby Dr. Kissinger had been asked why not do everything on the phone? And he'd said, "Because I won't answer the phone." So there is something quite important in diplomacy, possibly more than in a number of professions, about face-to-face contact, about being able to read people's emotions, people's motivations, about really understanding what makes individuals tick and what makes a country tick.

But at the same time, it is obviously possible to do much more through social media and reach ordinary people in a much more direct and dynamic way and interact with them. One of the things I like doing for example, did in the UN is a Twitter Q & A, for example, on human rights. And just as an anecdote, we were doing one of those Twitter sections, and someone actually videoed in from one of the refugee camps in Bangladesh. And that was a very powerful reminder of the extent to which that issue remains unaddressed.

Ben Judah:

So what do you think needs to be done in order for the UK to deploy these techniques and other ones and other things we haven't discussed yet in order to achieve that free trade agreement with the US? What steps do you think need to be taken?

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, if it weren't for COVID-19, I think we'd have taken them already. We've agreed with the Americans that we need a common-sense approach to actually getting the negotiations started. There's lots of virtual contact between the two sides. And both sides, both we and the Americans have now published on negotiating mandates, which are a little bit like blueprints. And so we're very conscious that we're ready to go. We're just trying to work out the last few details, and then hopefully we can launch these negotiations soon. I think that would be good in itself. But I also think in the COVID context, it would be great to have an affirmation of confidence of economic recovery. And I think if we could launch the FTA soon, that would give us that.

Ben Judah:

So now I want to ask about two potential changes in British foreign policy that I know people are interested in, in Washington. The first is, on Iran. Do you see Britain moving towards a more American position on Iran or stay more closely aligned with France, Germany, and the EU?

Dame Karen Pierce:

At the moment, I think we're very much in agreement with France and Germany. Where we share goals with the United States is that neither side wants Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. That's a very important goal. That's why we started the negotiations for the nuclear deal towards which is called, the JCPOA. And that remains a very important goal. We don't share the American approach to Iran of maximum pressure, but we do believe that what Iran does in the region is often destabilizing.

She [Iran] does have legitimate security interests in the region and we've made that clear. But the way she goes about pursuing those interests can often be very destabilizing for different companies in the region. They drain Iran of resources at a time when she has internal problems. And fundamentally they make Iran into not a normal country. Whereas the foreign secretary has

been quite clear, we want to Iran to come in from the cold and we want Iran and the Iranian people to take their proper place in international affairs, and we would like to be able to deal with them as a normal country.

Immediately after 9/11, I worked on the international response after 9/11, and at that point Iran was our ally. She was helping us tackle international terrorism. So I know what working with Iran looks like. And I think it's a matter of great regret, that the country with Iran's history and with her people as productive as the Iranian people are, should have gone down this different path. So I repeat the message, we'd like to see Iran come in from the cold.

Ben Judah:

The other change in British foreign policy that's being discussed in Washington at least, has COVID-19 figured a reflection or a reassessment of Britain's relationship with China? A few years ago, the golden era or so-called was inaugurated by David Cameron and Xi Jinping and these quite striking images of both of them having a pint in a country pub. Has that sort of bonhomie vanished from the UK-Chinese relationship?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think dealing with COVID-19 at the moment has meant that there's certainly not a lot of bonhomie in many international relationships at the moment. There's just a lot of focus on trying to deal with the pandemic and trying to get international cooperation working smoothly so that we can tackle the pandemic better. And that definitely includes China. We as Britain have been working closely with China on data, on equipment, on trying to get vaccines to tackle the pandemic.

Now that's not to say when the pandemic is over, when we're in a more comfortable place, we do have to learn the lessons of how the pandemic started, which fundamentally I think means tackling the public health challenge of the wet markets in China itself. And it also means looking at the international response and working out if there are things that could have been done faster or better. But for the moment we as Britain want to work with a number of international countries through the G20, through the UN to get on top of the virus.

Ben Judah:

So one question that I know a lot of people are very interested in is, could Britain potentially roll back the Huawei decision.

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, the prime minister has made clear that the decision's been taken. There is some opposition in Parliament, but I think the prime minister has been very clear. We have found ourselves in this position fundamentally because of market failure, that there ended up being only three companies who could provide the services required. We have made a commitment to British rural committees in particular to roll out 5G.

We have therefore sought to square the security versus access circle by keeping Huawei in what's called the periphery. She has a 30, 35 percent share of that business at the periphery. But there's no link between the periphery and what we would call the security core of what we

need to protect for national security. And we did a number of reviews. We listened to our partners and allies' concerns. We looked at them very seriously. And we have concluded that the system I've just outlined, this distinction between periphery and core, is the best way of protecting our national security.

Ben Judah:

What can Britain and the United States do together in terms of engagement with China?

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, I was just going to say, what I think we can do together about the Huawei situation is to make sure we're not put in a position again where there are so few firms that can supply what's needed. That's a market failure. Both Britain and the US have very good science. I would like to see us put that science together and look for ways to do more innovation together so that, for example, the next generation is something that Anglo-American firms can cooperate on together.

In terms of can we both handle China together, we don't have a common policy. We have some shared goals. We both share concerns about the way China sometimes uses Belt and Road for purely domestic advantage. We have concerns about China's human rights position. You'll be familiar with her treatment of the Uighurs. We've been very concerned about that, and we've said so. We have a lot of concerns about human rights situation within China. And I think it's probably fair to say that the crackdown in Wuhan when the virus first came out was more about the authority of the Communist Party, perhaps, than it was about tackling the virus. We have concerns about China from a trade perspective, including intellectual property perspective.

All those things that we and the Americans share views on, sometimes, we collaborate on. We used to collaborate with them at the UN, for example, very much on the human rights side. But we don't have a common policy. And in Britain, we have a different economic approach to China. We have a different approach to Chinese investment. And I don't think that is going to change in the short term.

Ben Judah:

Very interesting. I don't want us to get too stuck on the great powers. And I'd like to ask some questions about the world and geopolitics beyond that. What do you think are the five most important UK missions and why, excluding the mission to Washington?

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, I was going to say the answer to all five is the embassy in Washington, embassy in Washington, embassy in Washington. And then the fifth answer would be the mission in New York, but that would be very selfish.

I don't want to pick a hierarchy because all our diplomatic relationships are important to us. I think it's obviously very important that we have big embassies in the P5 capitals, in Moscow, in Paris, in Beijing, as well as in Washington and obviously London. Those are obviously important. But actually, what we have wanted to do as the UK in response to Global Britain and what we were talking about earlier, leaving the European Union but showing that we're very

much still engaged and out there in the world, we've actually expanded our diplomatic network and we have opened 10 posts, notably in Africa and in the South Pacific.

And if one looks at the South Pacific coast, if you think of climate change, biodiversity, these countries are becoming more and more important in the climate context. They face particular challenges on the financing side. They're small island developing states. But actually, they cover a fair amount of distance. When I was in the UN, we were working very hard on what sort of climate finance structures, mechanisms could best help these countries. It's good that we've been able to expand the diplomatic network to do that.

But I think it's also a sign of something else we really want to do. And again, this primarily affects Britain at the UN. I think a lot of countries are very good at talking to other countries who think like they do. And it's very tempting to keep talking to people who think like you do, because you can do a lot of cooperative things with them. But it's even more important, if I may say so, to talk to countries who don't agree with us and to try and work out if there are common ventures, try and work out if we can nevertheless find a way through a particular piece of public policy with a country who comes at it with a totally different economic system from us or a totally different background. And so I think our being able to expand our diplomatic network is actually really helpful in that context.

Ben Judah:

I'd love to hear your thoughts about the diplomacy of the coronavirus crisis right now. And I'd love to hear about what areas the UK is leading on and what that means for us diplomatically. There was a story in the New York Times the other day that Oxford University is leaping ahead in terms of developing a vaccine. I'd love to know what the diplomacy of that could be if, for example, Oxford got there first.

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think that's a great question. I think it really shows British science. And of course, part of what we do in diplomacy, and particularly commercial diplomacy, is showcase what Britain can do, what British scientists can do, what British companies can produce. And there's a whole branch of the Foreign Office and the Department for International Trade that tries to promote exports and collaborations and inward investment around that. And that, of course, continues even during the crisis. But I think the most important thing we're doing at the moment is twofold.

We're continuing our bilateral assistance to developing countries so that they can develop what we call health resilience. Infrastructure in some developing countries around health is still sadly weak. This was something we all committed to building up after Ebola in 2014. I don't think it's made as much progress as we all would like. A substantial part of British bilateral aid is going to developing countries to try and help with those resilience and infrastructure questions. We've also got some work we want to do around making sure economic recovery, when it comes, is green and sustainable. And again, that's something we can help developing countries with.

And then, of course, there's the UK's contribution to the multilateral response. The foreign secretary put four priorities to the group of G7 industrialized nations when they met. These priorities were indeed around vaccines, around development of vaccines, but also access to vaccines. We've been working recently with the European Commission and the WHO on

commitments so that vaccines can be properly accessed by countries around the world. There were measures about keeping the global economy open.

There's an interesting debate that's coming as to what do you need to reshore, ie. what global supply chains do you need to make sure you can either stockpile in your own country or make in your own country or make in those countries that you principally import from so that you're not caught short or surprised in another crisis. And you need to balance that, of course, with keeping the world economy open, keeping trade routes going. That is a debate that we'll be having with our partners allies.

Then there is something very important about looking after nationals overseas. We and other countries have been trying to bring our nationals back. And then we have wanted to support the UN, particularly the WHO. And so we gave those ideas to G7. They're being worked at. There's an echo of them in G20. Finance and health ministers are also meeting. And we very much want to try and encourage this collective effort. Pandemics are one of those big global policy areas that need a collective effort.

Ben Judah:

And is there any more good we could do with the US in the months to come?

Dame Karen Pierce:

We do a lot with the US already. The US is chairing G7, the group I alluded to earlier. A lot of the work that I mentioned is going through G7 with the US chairing. We have very regular health and scientific contact with the US. We also have a couple of companies that are both British and American or collaborating on vaccines and testing. And we've been working very closely with the Americans on the protective equipment, protective personal equipment. And I have to say, we've been very grateful for the help we've received from the administration and American organizations over equipment. And that collaboration will continue. And we'll look to collaborate also with other allies and partners on the supply and production of PPE.

Ben Judah:

I'd like to move the conversation into the closing phase with some questions about the world after the virus. And one of the issues that you've been working on very closely at the heart of this, too, is corruption and illicit finance where the UK has emerged as a leader in reforming its own system and exporting these best practices. I'd love to hear more about what the UK embassy has been doing on this front.

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, it's a very important area, as you say. And I think you're right. It probably is one of the growth areas that we need to explore with the Americans and others. We've introduced some quite robust legislation in the UK, which is one starting point. We have a lot of collaboration between our national crime agency and their American counterparts actually tracking illegal flows, particularly from some of the drugs running further south from the United States. And that collaboration is trying to, if you like, stay one step ahead of the scientific development so that governments can get on top of what the organized crime syndicates are actually doing and the technology that they're using. And then we've always had incredibly close cooperation with the

US agencies, like the FBI. And that relationship goes back a long way. We're trying to thicken all that up and, as I say, stay ahead of the curve so that we can continue to keep countries safe.

I think we're probably going to have to see more collaboration on the illicit finance side. There's a counter-terrorist angle to that, of course. I think in general, it's one of those areas that is relatively new to the relationship, but very productive opportunities looking forward.

Ben Judah:

What do you think the other growth areas on the horizon for the post-COVID world in terms of security threats, that Britain and the United States should be worrying about?

Dame Karen Pierce:

I think one has to be making sure that the international system in all its forms is robust enough if there's a pandemic in the future. And that means in some ways not just fighting the last war, but making sure that we are doing enough horizon scanning and planning and modeling to work out what the future challenges on the health security might be. And I mentioned at the start of this interview anti-microbial resistance. I was involved very heavily in the campaign against that when I was in Geneva. And I think we are going to have to come back to that because that is a problem that's not going away. It has a human dimension. It has an animal dimension. And we need to take it to the next level over the next few years.

I think there'll be a lot of collaboration in life sciences. Both we and the Americans have very good life sciences. I think there will be transformative technology like AI where we need to get to grips with what's the right balance between openness and government regulation, how do we manage these huge developments in technology so that they enhance the lives of our citizens rather than, as in some countries, China being one, are used to control citizens. And I think that's a fundamental debate. I think there will need to be much more looking at supply chains and globalization and getting that balance right between what needs to be done at home or in the vicinity, what can be subject to free trade.

And then I think there's something very important about value, to know what does it mean to want to be an open, transparent, tolerant country, democratic country in the modern world. How do we resist the rise of authoritarianism, how do we show respect to other countries while making sure we don't slip backwards on human rights. Those last two things are pretty intangible, but I think they probably go to the heart of what we really need to do to keep this alliance strong.

Ben Judah:

As a final question, bringing us back to Washington, what surprised you the most since you moved, admittedly not very far from New York to Washington, but what's the been the real surprises about taking on this new role?

Dame Karen Pierce:

Well, it's hard to say because when I first got here, I had to self-isolate for two weeks. And I stayed in the ambassador's residence, which is next door to the embassy. And then I came out of self-isolation looking forward to going back to my old haunts that I remembered from 25 years

ago, and then I walked straight into the DC lockdown because of the virus. I've not actually got out and about much in Washington. Maybe you could ask me that question post-lockdown being over. But I think there's always a big difference between multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. This is a bit of a facile distinction, but I think in general, multilateral diplomacy tends to be about the issues. And bilateral diplomacy tends to be about the people and the governments and parliaments. There's a difference in the way you approach them. There's a difference in what information and expertise you need to have.

But so far, everybody I've talked to in Washington, Republican and Democrat, has been very friendly, very warm about the prime minister in particular, very concerned about his health, and very keen to see this US-UK relationship not just endure, but go from strength to strength.

Ben Judah:

Thank you very much. Dame Karen Pierce, DCMG, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dame Karen Pierce:

Thanks very much for having me.