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Joint APPG  
COP26 Briefing Series

Climate Change

Environment

Renewable and Sustainable Energy

Net Zero

Sustainable Finance

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# Diplomatic effort for a successful COP26

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## Foreword

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The United Nations climate summit in Glasgow (COP26) will be one of the most important climate summits ever held and is likely to be the largest gathering of heads of State and Government ever hosted by the United Kingdom. This presents both a massive opportunity but also a formidable task in preparation and diplomacy, in order to make the summit a success.

The quality of the UK's diplomatic work will be crucial in the run up to COP26, building trust across governments and building coalitions capable of ushering in an ambitious agreement. As with any kind of negotiation, much of the leg work is done in advance of the main summit with officials and foreign ministers hammering out the detail, leaving only a few top-level matters to be decided upon when the leaders meet.

This would be a major challenge for any government, but the situation caused by the pandemic has added new layers of complexity. Questions remain about whether the summit will be able to go ahead with full pomp, ceremony and attendance or if it will need to be stripped back or even moved online, with the ramifications that brings to the quality of discussion and the limits it would impose on opportunities for external groups to engage with the process, including Parliamentarians.

The year's other international events will be critical to ensuring success in November, with the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15) in China, a G7 summit in the UK, the G20 meeting in Rome, the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Rwanda and our COP26 co-host Italy hosting the 'Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition'<sup>1</sup> summit in Milan in August.

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## The UK's diplomatic influence

The UK has an opportunity to take a number of international steps – on diplomacy, trade and investments – which could increase the likelihood of a successful outcome at COP26. Domestic decarbonisation will also be key in staking out a ‘leadership’ position.

### Domestic Leadership

An important part of how the UK exerts influence internationally is by showing domestic leadership. Indeed international credibility is impossible without it. The commitment in 2019 by the UK government to a legally binding net zero target by 2050 is an example of this leadership, as is the pledge submitted to the UN in December 2020 for a 68% cut by 2030 - the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution, or NDC. However, pledges mean nothing without the actions to fulfil them. There is still more work to be done to ensure UK policies are adequate to put us on track to meeting these targets. This puts a new premium on policymaking over the coming six months in areas such as energy efficiency, renewables, electric vehicles, zero-carbon home heating and resource and land use.

The election of Joe Biden has brought a renewed commitment from the US, with re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement among his first acts. Most significantly of all, the world's biggest polluter, China, committed last year to a 2060 net zero target. These pledges, together with others from the EU, Japan and Korea, mean that roughly two thirds of the global economy<sup>2</sup> now has a mid-century net zero target<sup>3</sup>. Ambitious action in the next decade will be a test of the commitment to these targets. Since President Biden's election, senior US Democrats have already observed that the US, UK and other would-be ‘climate leaders’ must be ‘walking the walk at home’ by COP26 in order for their leadership credentials to be taken seriously<sup>4</sup>.

### Diplomacy and Influence

As with any other international negotiation, the COP26 outcome hinges critically on intensive and extensive diplomatic engagement in the months leading to it. In previous successful climate summits, notably COP21 in Paris in 2015, the host government deployed all its diplomatic resources in advance to build alliances, and to understand and resolve problematic issues. A key element of the French approach was to engage other governments to do some of the ‘heavy lifting’. The UK could profitably pursue a similar strategy but doing so will involve addressing tensions thrown up by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.

Two of the major areas of focus for the summit are carbon reduction targets and finance. In the Paris Agreement governments agreed they should put forward new, strengthened NDCs ‘by 2020’: but fewer than a quarter have<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, governments confirmed in the Paris Agreement a target first agreed at the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 (COP15), that they would collectively mobilise \$100bn per year by 2020 to help the poorest nations decarbonise and protect against climate impacts. Funding is currently a long way below this figure.<sup>6</sup>

Both issues, and others, will need astute and determined UK leadership with the active involvement of other nations and blocs. Of particular importance is the potential alignment between the UK as host, the EU and the US. Together, this group can be influential in bringing other countries on board, in particular building a constructive relationship with China and India and engaging countries like Brazil who are falling behind on action.

In addition to hosting COP26, the UK will host the G7 Leaders' Summit in the Spring.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the main issue will likely be the post-Covid-19 economic recovery, placing a focus on how countries ‘build back greener’ will enable them to strengthen their climate pledges, connecting the two

summit agendas. If diplomatic conversations are done well, the G7 summit can be used to leverage specific outcomes ahead of COP26, such as enhanced NDCs from the world's biggest emitters.

The UK's COP26 co-chair, Italy, is also due to be hosting the G20 in Rome. This presents another important staging post in getting the world's larger economies together to discuss their commitments to decarbonise. With Brazil and Australia present at this meeting, it is an important opportunity for us to work to engage those countries who have so far been less willing to do so.

For February the UK had assumed the Presidency of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>8</sup> The security dimension of climate change, looking at the "links between climate change and conflict prevention measures"<sup>9</sup> is to be one of the UK's priorities for his tenure, continuing a UK interest that dates back to 2007.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the G7 summit, these fora are important opportunities for the UK Government to keep the drumbeat going towards an ambitious outcome in November.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>11</sup> meeting in China (scheduled for May, but with postponement likely) to negotiate a new deal for the natural world is the first major dedicated environment/climate summit of this year. There is strong interplay between the climate change and biodiversity objectives, with nature-based solutions such as reforestation playing a vital role in the response to both the nature and climate crises.

The postponed 2020 meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government is due in Rwanda in June.<sup>12</sup> It will bring together developed nations such as the UK, Australia and Canada alongside many of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change and future climate related disasters, such as Mozambique, Fiji and Bangladesh. Climate will be high on the agenda, with anticipation of increased cooperation between Commonwealth nations to find long-term solutions to climate risk and fulfilling the West's climate finance pledge of 2009 likely a key topic.

Overseas development aid has long been a tool in the UK's ability to support the reliance of developing nations and exert diplomatic pressure and influence as one of the world's largest givers. The Foreign Secretary announced that this will be cut from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI (Gross National Income). While he argued that only one other country in the world spent more than 0.5%<sup>13</sup> in 2019, many are concerned, given how important UK aid has been in building longer term resilience to climate change in developing and vulnerable countries, along with economic development and preparing for disease.<sup>14</sup>



## Comment

### Diplomatic preparation

*Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti, Vice Dean (public Policy) at the Faculty of Engineering Sciences at University of London, Former UK Government Climate and Energy Envoy, former Foreign Secretary's Special Representative for Climate Change and former Commander UK Maritime Forces.*

Key to delivering a successful COP will be the preparation, including extensive and persistent diplomatic engagement by the UK. The UK should seek to work in partnership with other countries, including the co-chair Italy, long before nations' representatives assemble in Glasgow. This might seem a difficult ask for a government that is already engaged in addressing Covid-19 and post EU membership, but it is necessary and what the world is expecting of the UK; failure to commit fully to such action will seriously reduce the likelihood of success at the COP and undermine the country's wider credibility with key allies.

“  
The UK is presented with an almost unique opportunity to lead the world's response to the challenges posed by a changing climate”

Although such engagement will be led by the FCDO, through its highly experienced diplomatic network, it will require the commitment of all government departments, working with the private sector and wider society, to ensure that a consistent and coherent message is delivered on the international stage; one which must be supported by domestic decarbonisation action. At times this will be challenging but in the absence of such an approach it will be very hard for a Head of Mission or member of the Climate Network to persuade a nation to pursue a low carbon energy policy if, at the same time, the UK appears to be doing the opposite, for example by considering opening a new coal mine; the UK not only has to practice what it preaches, it has to be seen to be doing so.

Whether it be in the formal surroundings of bodies such as the UNSC, G7 or CHOGM, or in a bilateral meeting between Ministers or officials, all of the UK's representatives must know what the country is seeking to achieve; the end game, which I would suggest is broader than just COP26. Whilst the headline objective is to ensure that nations demonstrate high ambition in their revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the lead up to and execution of COP26 provides the UK with an ideal opportunity to both demonstrate what a 'global Britain' can offer and strengthen partnerships with other nations, especially where there is common ground. In working with partners the UK will sometimes find itself in the lead role whilst on other occasions it will be in a supporting capacity. This should not be seen as an issue; it is the outcome that matters.

Diplomacy is a two-way process and whilst the UK can, and should, be clear in what it is seeking to achieve there is no certainty that other nations will have the same priorities. Although in diplomatic circles the UK is considered adept at brokering agreements and finding solutions to seemingly intractable problems, in some instances, to achieve progress it may be necessary to compromise in other areas or make the proposition more attractive by finding incentives.

These may be climate specific, where the UK has much to offer: for example in the transfer of low carbon technology, expertise on drawing up climate legislation, or the provision of climate related aid. Alternatively, the offer may relate to other challenges that nations face, including tackling the consequences of the current Covid-19 pandemic, or it may be about addressing a long-standing issue.

## Timeline: 2021

*A brief, and by no means exhaustive, list of some of the key diplomatic engagement points in 2021.*

25 <sup>th</sup> January	Global Commission on Adaptation: <u>Climate Adaptation Summit</u>
26 <sup>th</sup> – 29 <sup>th</sup> January	<u>World Economic Forum</u> Annual Meeting
February	UK Chairs UN Security Council with <u>focus on climate security</u>
17 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> May	<u>COP15</u> – UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China
June	G7 Summit, Carbis Bay, Cornwall
September	UK Government - Net Zero Strategy expected
14 <sup>th</sup> September	76 <sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly
28 <sup>th</sup> - 30 <sup>th</sup> September	<u>Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition</u> COP Summit
30 <sup>th</sup> September – 2 <sup>nd</sup> October	<u>Pre-COP</u> , Milan, Italy
30 <sup>th</sup> – 31 <sup>st</sup> October	G20 Summit, Rome, Italy

1<sup>st</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>

November

## COP26 – UN Climate Summit in Glasgow, Scotland

### Glossary

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** - the international treaty under which climate negotiations take place. The treaty was signed in 1992 and entered into force in 1994. Its ultimate objective is to 'prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.' It also enshrines the duty of richer nations to lead the low-carbon transition and to support the poorest financially.

**Conference of the Parties (COP)** - a generic term for the ultimate decision-making body of an international convention, which in the case of the UNFCCC convenes annually. Often also used to refer to the conferences where the decision-making body convenes.

**26th Conference of the Parties (COP26)** - the 26th time that the COP to the UNFCCC has convened. To be held in Glasgow in November 2021.

**The Paris Agreement** - an extension to the UNFCCC agreed at COP21 in Paris. Signatories committed to limit global temperature rise to 'well below' 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and 'pursue efforts' to limit it to 1.5°C. Where previous efforts to reach a global agreement on emissions reduction focused on dividing the remaining carbon budget between countries, the Paris Agreement invites countries to put forward their own contributions. The intention is that these contributions will become increasingly progressive will collectively achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

**Paris Agreement Rulebook:** guidelines for how the Paris Agreement will operate in practice. The majority of the rulebook was agreed at COP24 in Katowice, however there are a number of outstanding issues such as the operation of market and non-market cooperation mechanisms.

**Kyoto Protocol:** The Kyoto Protocol was the first major extension to the UNFCCC, adopted in 1997. Unlike the Paris Agreement that requires emission reductions from all countries, the Kyoto Protocol only required action from industrialised countries and economies in transition.

**Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):** An entirely separate entity to the UNFCCC that synthesises evidence on the trajectory and risks of climate change, and on pathways for decarbonisation, for policymakers. These 'Assessment Reports' are updated and released approximately every 6 years to reflect the latest evidence from a range of academic disciplines.

**Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC):** A formal commitment from a party to the Paris Agreement detailing that party's contribution towards the objectives of the Agreement. NDCs must be submitted every 5 years and must reflect the Party's 'highest possible ambition'.

**Party Groupings:** Collections of UNFCCC member countries that share interests and objectives and coordinate their activities and negotiation positions. Groupings exist for each major geographical region alongside groupings based on socio-economic characteristics. They include the G-77/China grouping of developing countries, the European Union grouping and the Small Island Developing States grouping that has been instrumental in driving more aggressive action. Parties may be members of more than one grouping.

**Global Stocktake:** Established as part of the Paris Agreement, the Global Stocktake will comprehensively assess progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. Stocktakes must be completed every 5 years, with the first due in 2023.

**Article 6:** Article of the Paris Agreement covering market and nonmarket cooperation mechanisms. One of the few areas of the rulebook yet to be agreed and an area that will be negotiated at COP26.

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**NOTE:** This briefing has been prepared by the secretariats of the APPGs for Environment, Climate Change, Net Zero, Renewable and Sustainable Energy, and Sustainable Finance. The views expressed in the briefing and comment piece are not the views of the APPG Chairs.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://ukcop26.org/pre-cop/the-youth-summit/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://unfccc.int/news/update-from-climate-champions-on-occasion-of-climate-ambition-summit>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://eciu.net/netzerotracker>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/20/john-kerry-climate-460477>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-which-countries-met-the-uns-2020-deadline-to-raise-climate-ambition#>
- <sup>6</sup> [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/climate-finance-provided-and-mobilised-by-developed-countries-in-2013-17\\_39faf4a7-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/climate-finance-provided-and-mobilised-by-developed-countries-in-2013-17_39faf4a7-en)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/15/uk-plans-early-g7-virtual-meeting-and-presses-ahead-with-switch-to-d10>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/presidency>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-un-britain-idUSKBN2A13GS>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN1736824820070418>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://thecommonwealth.org/chogm>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-11-26/debates/A2442925-0DA2-4262-B564-1C6FEE24881A/OfficialDevelopmentAssistance#contribution-C7E17186-0785-4450-A144-AED840B22470>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/11/examining-impacts-uk-foreign-aid-budget-cut>

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