

ELECTION 2017: Foreign Policy – a new global stage

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Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson [Image: Flickr]

UPON TAKING office, Theresa May signaled a break from the foreign policy agenda which has defined the west since the fall of the Berlin Wall. No longer, she said, should the United Kingdom and other western powers attempt to “make the world in their own image.”

What Britain’s new mission in the world will be remains unclear and the competing occupants for Number 10 have very different visions for our place in the world. The government is passionately committed to the special relationship. Mrs May’s state visit invitation to the new President attracted criticism.

On the agenda will be a free trade deal which the government hopes will usher in a new era of British free trade but critics argue that Mr Trump’s rhetoric should disqualify him from the privilege. The Syrian Civil War rages on with no end in sight. The missile strike on the Shayrat Airbase was the first unilateral attack by the United States on the Assad government. Mr Trump also dropped the “mother of all bombs” in Afghanistan. This suggests that the Trump administration will not be as isolationist as expected.

The government defended the attack and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has signalled that Britain could support the US militarily in the future. Jeremy Corbyn has repeatedly stressed that he believes any unilateral action without the UN is egregious and illegal. The leader of the Opposition’s historic sympathies for the IRA, staunch opposition to the nuclear deterrent his unclear views regarding armed police and the Security Service serve to make gaining credibility on defence and security and uphill battle for the Labour Party.

Mr Corbyn has stressed the importance of abiding by international obligations such as nuclear nonproliferation and as a pacifist he has advocated for a greater emphasis on diplomacy over military action. He is also a well-known sceptic of NATO whereas Mrs May has committed to the NATO target of 2 per cent of GDP on defence. The prospective prime ministers have starkly different worldviews and whoever holds the keys to Downing Street will determine the United Kingdom’s role in world affairs.



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