

A Global Britain Without Foreign Aid?: Analysis of the United Kingdom's Official Development Assistance (2015-2023)

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Abstract

Official development assistance (ODA) is a global issue/problem that concerns developed and under-developed countries from different perspectives. This issue is particularly relevant to the United Kingdom (UK) due to its colonial legacy and its role as a major donor country. In the post-Brexit period, as the UK struggles to find a global role for itself through the Global Britain strategy, ODA has become more critical for the UK. Despite this, the article argues that the problems the UK has experienced in the financial amount and distribution of ODA have made the country's soft power and global role problematic. In this respect, the article argues that the UK's post-Brexit ODA challenges stem not only from the amount of aid, but also from how it is distribu-

ted. This argument is justified by digging into the history of foreign aid in the UK. It also highlights the problems the UK has faced concerning ODA by analysing official ODA statistics from 2015 to 2023 by country, region, year, and type of aid. Additionally, the article offers predictions on how to address these issues. Furthermore, it discusses the colonial ties of the UK and the Commonwealth within the framework of ODA.

Keywords: The United Kingdom, ODA, Foreign Aid, Development, The Commonwealth, Global Britain.

JEL Codes: F35, O1

Citation: Erkul, İ. Ç. (2026). A global Britain without foreign aid?: Analysis of the United Kingdom's official development assistance (2015–2023). *Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches (ROMAYA Journal)*, 2026(1).

1. Introduction

The colonial legacy of the UK has created a responsibility for the country to provide foreign aid to its former colonies. In the UK, foreign assistance, which governments have carried out over time under various names, institutional structures, and methods, remains an important foreign and domestic policy issue for the UK today. It is essential to note that some individuals consider ODA as a form of aid or compensation that the UK should provide to developing countries, owing to its imperial past, as well as those who view it as a foreign policy instrument and seek to advance national interests through ODA.

During David Cameron's premiership, foreign aid became a prominent issue. As a result of the importance given to foreign aid, in 2013, the UK achieved the United Nations (UN) target of spending 0.7% of its Gross National Income (GNI) on aid. Another important development in the context of ODA emerged in the UK in 2015 with the adoption of the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act. This Act mandated the UK to allocate 0.7% of its gross national income for ODA. It is also worth noting that the UK successfully met the 0.7% target between 2013 and 2020. However, it failed to meet this target in 2021–2022 and 2023, and governments used some ODA funds for purposes other than foreign aid. Problems experienced in foreign aid have created a highly problematic image for the UK's ODA.

On the other hand, the significant reduction in bilateral foreign aid received by Africa and Asia from the UK is damaging both the UK's global responsibilities and its foreign policy based on the Global Britain strategy. Finally, the UK allocated a significant portion of its ODA budget to refugees within its own country, especially in 2022 and 2023. As a result, the effectiveness of the UK's ODA has come under scrutiny and faced notable criticism.

The article aims to analyse the UK's ODA for the years between 2015 and 2023. The year 2024 is excluded from this study because the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has not yet published the official "Final UK ODA Spend 2024" report at the time of writing. The article also analyses the UK's bilateral ODA based on the top 20 recipient countries¹ and questions whether these countries have historical/colonial ties or are members of the Commonwealth. The author created all tables used in the article, taking into account the data in official reports published by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the FCDO. It is essential to note that the article not only presents the UK's ODA data but also analyses this data in conjunction with the UK's foreign policy and global politics.

This article consists of three sections, excluding the introduction and conclusion. First, a brief history of foreign aid in the UK is examined, and the institutional changes and transformations in foreign aid are detailed. In the second section, the definition and scope of ODA are discussed, presenting a multifaceted analysis of the UK's ODA from 2015 to 2023 using official data. This section also addresses the challenges the UK faces regarding its ODA. Finally, the last section offers recommendations for improving the UK's ODA under the title "Thoughts on the UK's Official Development Assistance."

2. A Brief History of the UK's Foreign Aid

When reviewing the literature on foreign aid of the UK, it is essential to start with the Crown Agents, established in 1833. However, it is important to understand that the Crown Agents should not be seen as an organization that provides foreign aid.

Although the Office of Crown Agents for the Colonies was established in 1833, the first traces of the office must be seen in the Seven Years' War (Penson, 1925: 196). The establishment of an office by the British Treasury to manage all colonial affairs was a significant development for the Empire. The Office of Crown Agents for the Colonies, which developed and evolved over time, managed a considerable portion of the colonies' borrowings and investments. If supply or technical assistance could not be provided in a colony, these services were also implemented by the Crown Agents in London (Ponko, 1967: 42-43). Moreover, the Crown Agents for the Colonies served as an administrative and financial intermediary, managed financial transactions, procurement, and investment operations for the colonies (Mercer & Collins, 1905: XV). As can be seen, the work that the Crown Agents did on behalf of Britain's colonies cannot be classified as foreign aid. On the other hand, considering that the Crown Agents do not provide grants or financial aid and operate within the borders of the Empire, it would be inaccurate to consider their activities as part of foreign aid. It should also be noted that the Crown Agents entered insolvency after 1 August 2024.

It is important to continue with the Colonial Development Act of 1929, which can be viewed as the beginning of the UK's foreign aid. This Act was established to reduce economic stagnation in the UK and to promote industrial and agricultural activities in British colonies. The Act aimed to use an annual fund of £1 million for these purposes. Between 1929 and 1940, a total of £8.8 million was spent under this Act over 11 years. The 1929 Act was later replaced

¹ This article's analysis relies mainly on official ODA reports from the DFID and the FCDO. These reports focus on the twenty countries that receive the most UK ODA. For this reason, the analysis in this article covers the top 20 recipient countries from 2015 to 2023.

by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, passed in 1940. This new Act significantly increased the amount of aid. It also included the cancellation of the colonial administration's debt to the UK, which was approximately £10 million. The amount of aid expenditures and the scope of aid continued to be updated with the adoption of many similar acts throughout the years. (British Information Services, 1955: 7-8).

The Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) was established in 1948 with the Overseas Resources Development Act (ORDA) to improve the living standards, productivity, and prosperity of people living in colonies. The primary purpose of the CDC can be expressed as identifying development opportunities in the economies of underdeveloped countries and supporting them. It is important to note that this support does not involve making grants. In this context, the CDC also invests in various projects. The CDC has two expectations from the projects it invests in. The first was to provide a reasonable financial return on its investment. The second was to contribute to the development of the host country. As can be understood from this, the CDC only invested in projects that had the potential to cover the investment cost. Naturally, the construction of structures such as schools, hospitals, and public service buildings, which cannot generate income, is not within the scope of the CDC's investments (Rogerson 2013: 229-230). Between 1948 and 1950, considered the first period of CDC's activity, total expenditure on numerous ongoing projects in the colonial territories was estimated at £31 million (Wicker, 1955: 216). Although it was a newly established entity, the capital expenditure mentioned could be considered important given the circumstances at the time. From this perspective, the CDC emerged as a significant financial institution, playing a pivotal role in shaping the colonies' development in the early years of its operations.

The transformation of the CDC over the following years was remarkable. Although the abbreviation of the CDC remained the same, its name was changed to Commonwealth Development Corporation in 1963. Later, although the Commonwealth phrase remained in its name, the CDC was authorized to invest² in countries beyond Commonwealth members in 1969. In 1997, the CDC became a Public-Private Partnership (PPP), and in 1999, it ceased to be a legal public institution and became a public limited company (PLC) operating under the name CDC Capital Partners. Following restructuring in 2004, the CDC Group PLC continued as a wholly Government-owned investment company. During this period, instead of making direct investments, the CDC was in-

vesting in other private equity firms. In other words, the CDC would give the money to these companies, and they would invest with it. These companies generally held these investments for 4 to 8 years. When the investment was sold, the principal amount and profits were returned to the CDC. (Thompson, 2011: 3-4).

In 1961, the Department of Technical Co-operation (DTC) was established; although it was short-lived, it played an important role in the UK's foreign aid efforts. The DTC aimed to offer technical assistance to countries outside the UK, particularly in the areas of economic development, public administration, and social services. To make this possible, a Secretary for Technical Co-operation was appointed to the DTC (Department of Technical Co-operation Act 1961, 1961). To elaborate further, in 1961, the UK established a clear framework for providing technical assistance to its colonies and newly independent developing countries. The technical assistance the UK provided to independent countries and its colonies was delivered in different ways. As decolonization accelerated in the British Empire, coordinating such assistance became increasingly complex. To address these problems, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan proposed the creation of a new department to manage the growing complexity. The DTC was thus planned to set priorities, distribute resources, and oversee the assistance programs. Over its four years of operation, from 1961 to 1965, the DTC had a total budget of £113 million (Williams, 1964: 31-41), a considerable sum at the time. In a relatively short time, it became clear that the limited nature of DTC necessitated a shift to a new structure for foreign aid. For this reason, the UK attempted to address its problems with foreign aid by establishing the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) in 1964.

The year 1964 marked a notable transition for the UK regarding foreign aid. As Riley explains, the establishment of the ODM in 1964 meant that the British Empire continued its development approach towards its former colonies/territories. On the other hand, this new institutional structure also included directing foreign aid not only to former colonies but also to "overseas" countries in general. In this respect, the establishment of the ministry reflects both a break from colonialism and its continuing effects (2017: 54). Consequently, in 1964, the ODM was established to take responsibility for foreign aid, and this ministry needed to operate independently of the Foreign Office. This independent structure aimed to ensure that development policies would not be influenced by foreign policy interests (Aden, 2011: 16). However, as will be discussed below, the establishment of the ODM and its transformations

² In her 1967 article, Miles predicted that the foreign aid provided by the UK would not generate economic benefits for itself in the foreseeable future (1967: 163).

underlined the difficulties faced in institutionalizing foreign aid in the UK.

When Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath took office in 1970,³ the department was renamed the Overseas Development Administration.⁴ Additionally, the Administration was incorporated into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) with a degree of autonomy. The Conservative government was followed by the Labour government, which restored the department to independent ministerial status. Not surprisingly, when the Conservative Party came to power with Thatcher in 1979, the Administration was reattached to the FCO. In 1997,⁵ the Blair Government restructured the Administration as the Department for International Development (DFID) and appointed a cabinet minister to the DFID (MacClancy, 2017: 11)

Shortly after the establishment of the DFID, the UK Government published a White Paper entitled "Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century". This document was important as it outlined the government's commitment to international development and defined the strategy for implementing its development policies (Department for International Development, 1997). Additionally, it is worth noting that in the years following the end of the Cold War, Eastern Europe and the Middle East gained greater significance for Western donor countries in terms of foreign aid (Khadka, 1997: 1054).

One of the most noteworthy developments about the UK's foreign aid in recent years was the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act, passed in 2015. With this Act, the UK makes provisions to allocate 0.7% of its GNI for ODA. The Act defines the Foreign Secretary's duty to ensure that the UK's ODA reaches 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) for the year 2015 and subsequent years. One of the most important things we need to know about this Act is what will happen if the 0.7% target is not met. In such a case, the government is required to submit a report to Parliament. This report must state the reasons for the failure and explain the actions taken to achieve the 0.7% target in the coming years. (International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, 2015).

In September 2020, the creation of the FCDO marked another important development in recent times. With the merger of the DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the transfer of their functions to the FCDO meant the end of the DFID and the FCO and the establishment of a new department (The Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) Order 2020, 2020). The primary objective of this merger was to unify foreign policy and foreign development aid. From another viewpoint, this merger can be compared to the integration of the Overseas Development Administration into the FCO in the 1970s. It was not a coincidence that the Conservatives held power during both periods of change. Thus, the foundation of the FCDO enabled foreign policy priorities to influence foreign aid decisions, much like in the 1970s.

The importance of national interest in development aid provided by the UK was not a policy that emerged with Brexit (Dawar, 2023: 107-114). Still, in the aftermath of the Brexit Referendum, the UK revised its approach to development aid to prioritize national interests. This shift has arguably resulted in an increasing neglect of the critical issues related to "development" based on aid. (Dawar, 2023: 106).

As mentioned above, the CDC was established in 1948, and its name changed to the Commonwealth Development Corporation in 1963. In 2022, the UK Government re-created the UK's development finance institution, as British International Investment (BII), building upon the legacy of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. One of the key objectives of creating the BII was to provide a competitive alternative to Chinese⁶ investment in low- and middle-income countries. BII is also intended to generate income from investments in businesses and programs within these countries (Loft, 2022: 4).

This section of the article will conclude by discussing the definition and scope of ODA. It is important to clarify the scope of ODA and identify the types of assistance that fall under this classification. According to the literature, ODA includes aid provided directly by governments, either bilaterally or multilaterally. In this respect, assistance provided by non-state actors such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), religious institutions, and private foundations remains outside the scope of ODA (Riddell, 2009: 49).

³ It should be noted that, in the mid-1970s, the UK Government aimed to provide foreign aid primarily to the least developed countries (LDCs), and it also aimed to ensure that this aid would directly benefit the poorest individuals within those countries. In other words, the government's aim was not only to provide aid to the LDCs but also to reach the people in these countries who needed it most (The British Ministry of Overseas Development, 1976: 159).

⁴ Based on the Overseas Development Administration's mission statement, the focus of ODA is to improve the quality of life of people in developing countries and to contribute to the sustainable development of these countries (Boone & Davis 1996: 23).

⁵ It is important to note that public opinion in the UK during this period was largely supportive of foreign aid. Public opinion surveys indicated that in 1996, 81 percent of the British people believed that aid to developing countries should be a government priority, and this figure decreased to 73 percent by 1998 (INRA 1999, p. 2, as cited in Olsen, 2001: 653).

⁶ During the 2000s, China emerged as a significant donor country, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the global financial crisis of 2008 weakened the economic strength and foreign aid budgets of Western donors (Connolly & Sicard, 2012: 111). In this context, the increase in the UK's foreign aid budget during Cameron's term is also a response to the decline of foreign aid during that period.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the main issues about the scope and types of assistance classified as ODA are listed below (OECD n.d.):

- ODA must be provided by states, local governments, official institutions, public agencies, or institutions affiliated with them.
- ODA must contribute directly to the economic development and welfare of developing countries.
- ODA must be provided to countries, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and multilateral development organizations accepted by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC).
- Depending on the country and activity, the financing provided by ODA must be entirely grants, include a certain percentage of grants, and consist of concessional loans.
- It must support projects aimed at alleviating the social or economic burdens of migration in developing countries.
- Expenditures for armed forces to deliver humanitarian aid are considered within the scope of ODA.

In this respect, foreign aid and ODA are different from each other, and the scope of foreign aid is often unclear. Johnson raised the question of whether the construction of roads, bridges, ports, and airports in a country should be considered military or economic aid. In this context, he noted that classifying/catego-

rizing foreign aid can be problematic in some situations (1959: 10). At the end of this section, it is worth noting that while the study focuses on ODA, it also addresses issues related to foreign aid.

3. Analysis of the UK's Official Development Assistance between 2015 and 2023

Based on the decision taken at the plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 5 December 1980, the UN adopted a target for developed countries to spend at least 0.7% of their GNI as ODA:

"A rapid and substantial increase will be made in official development assistance by all developed countries, with a view to reaching and where possible surpassing the agreed international target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries" (United Nations General Assembly, 1980: 108).

As mentioned above, in 2013, the UK achieved the UN target of spending 0.7% of its GNI on aid, and in 2015, the UK made provisions to allocate 0.7% percent of its GNI as ODA. In this regard, 2015 marked an important milestone for the UK's ODA. Examining the documents prepared by the DFID and the FCDO, which detail the UK's ODA spending from 2015 to 2023, shows interesting information and statistics. It may be essential to examine first whether the UK meets its ODA target of 0.7% between 2015 and 2023.

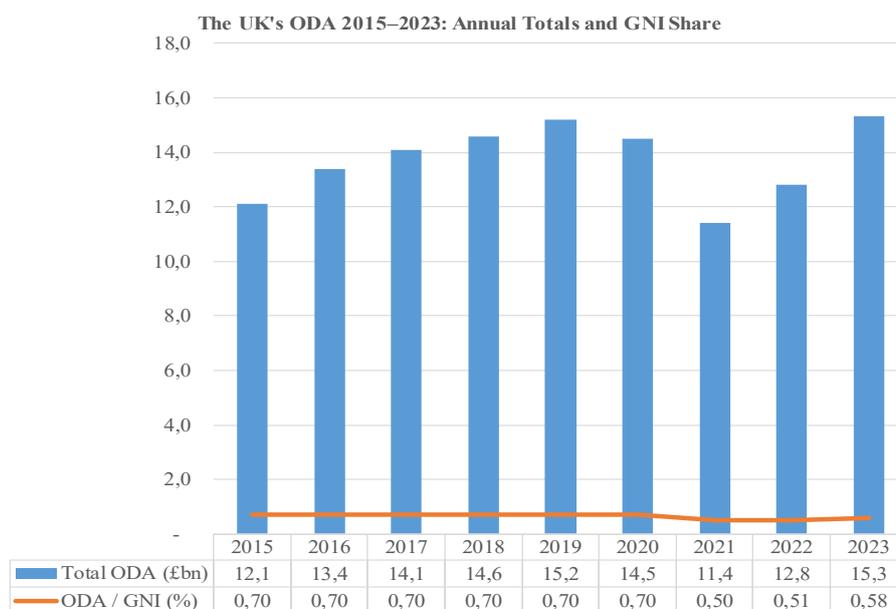


Figure 1. The UK's ODA 2015–2023: Annual Totals and GNI Share⁷

Source: (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

⁷ The author created all the tables and figures used in the article, taking into account the data in official reports published by the DFID and the FCDO.

When David Cameron assumed office in 2010, the UK began prioritizing foreign aid. As a result, for the first time, the UK met the 0.7% target in 2013. With Cameron’s efforts, the UK became the first G7 country to achieve this target (Erkul, 2021a: 125-126). Upon examining Figure 1, it is evident that the UK met its 0.7% ODA target between 2015 and 2020. Also, in this period, although 2020 is an exception, the increase in GNI (when calculated in GBP) in the UK was positively reflected in the amount of ODA. Although the 0.7% target was achieved in 2020, the amount of ODA declined due to a contraction in the UK’s GNI. In 2021, the UK did not meet the UN targets for the first time since 2013. Furthermore, the 0.7% target was also not achieved in the years following 2021.

Although the UK did not meet the 0.7% target in 2021 and subsequent years, the increase in GNI in the UK, particularly in 2022 and 2023, led to a rise in the amount of ODA. As a result, in 2023, the highest amount of ODA was reached compared to the period from 2015 to 2023. However, during this period, although bilateral aid has historically been important in the UK’s ODA, the amount of bilateral aid continues to decline. This can be considered a significant problem regarding the future of the UK’s development aid.

Additionally, during the same period, a significant portion of ODA is allocated to support refugees/asy-

lum seekers in the UK. This allocation is the main reason for the decline in the UK’s bilateral aid. In 2023, the UK spent £4.2 billion in this regard (FCDO, 2024). This policy has had an important impact on the allocation of ODA. Considering this, the following question must be asked strongly: Is it legal and moral for the UK to use ODA for domestic purposes rather than for supporting development efforts abroad?

“Foreign aid is supposed to be spent alleviating poverty by providing humanitarian and development assistance overseas. But under international rules, governments can spend some of their foreign aid budgets at home to support asylum seekers during the first year after their arrival.” (Landale, 2025).

Therefore, temporary support provided by donor countries to refugees and asylum seekers in their own countries is indeed accepted within the borders of ODA (FCDO, 2023b). As can be seen, donor countries may include expenditures for migrants and refugees in their own countries as ODA. However, this should not prevent the UK from being criticized on ethical grounds because neither the purpose nor the name of the aid has changed. The UK has strayed from its 0,7% target by reallocating resources from ODA to domestic priorities. It has reduced its development aid to developing countries since the start of the Russia-Ukraine War.

Table 1. Top Sectors for the UK’s ODA Spend 2015 - 2023

Top Sectors for the UK’s ODA Spend (2015-2023)								
Humanitarian	Humanitarian	Humanitarian	Multisector	Humanitarian	Health	Refugees in Donor Countries	Refugees in Donor Countries	Refugees in Donor Countries
2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

Source: (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

Table 1 clearly illustrates that the top sectors for ODA spending until 2021 were in line with development assistance. In 2021 and beyond, the spending of donor countries on refugees came first. This situation constitutes the essence of the criticism made in this section of the article. It is also worth noting that the ODA allocated for refugees in the UK increased fourfold in 2023 compared to 2021.

Additionally, the UK’s efforts to reduce poverty through foreign aid can be disrupted by global security problems. During periods when security concer-

ns are more apparent, the UK often has to allocate a larger percentage of its foreign aid to address these problems rather than focusing on global poverty reduction (Woods, 2005: 405). So, historically, concerns about international security were not a notable factor in the distribution of the UK’s bilateral aid (McKinlay and Little, 1978: 324). However, today, concerns about international security play a crucial role in the distribution of the UK’s bilateral aid. This policy restricts the use of development aid for its intended developmental purposes.

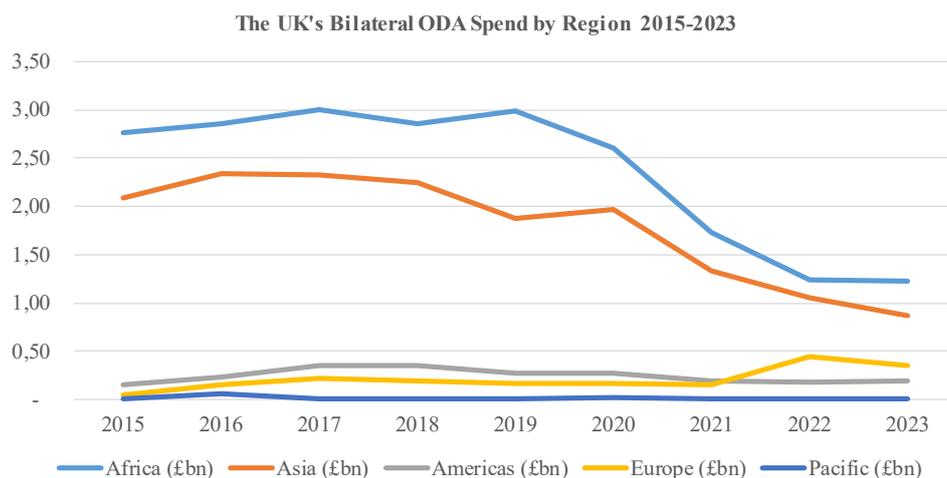


Figure 2. The UK's Bilateral ODA Spend by Region 2015-2023

Source: (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

The UK's bilateral foreign aid to Africa and Asia began to decline in 2020, mainly due to political instability in the UK and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors can be seen as reasons for the decline in bilateral ODA. However, from a realistic perspective, there is no justification for the decline of bilateral ODA towards Africa⁸ and Asia.

It is essential to note that, although the UK's bilateral ODA spending decreased towards Africa and Asia, both continents remain significant for the UK in terms of ODA. When examining the continental distribution of the 20 countries receiving the most ODA from the UK, as listed in Table 2, African and Asian countries, with a few exceptions, accounted for all 20 of the UK's top ODA recipients between 2015 and 2023. Therefore, it should be noted that the decreasing bilateral ODA spending towards Africa and Asia, as shown in Figure 2, is not related to the fact that the countries receiving aid are outside of Africa and Asia, but rather to the decrease in the amount of aid.

During Theresa May's premiership, the idea that the UK should find a way for itself outside the European Union (EU) became a central focus. At this time, May aimed to demonstrate that her country could play a significant global role by giving special importance to Africa.⁹ Following May, the efforts towards a global Britain strategy continued during the Johnson era. But both the political instability experienced due to Brexit and along with a greater focus on the United States (US) and the CANZUK (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK) countries in foreign policy (Erkul, 2021a: 143-190) led to a relative decline

in attention toward Africa and Asia. This shift may explain the decline in bilateral foreign aid to these continents.

As McGillivray and Oczkowski have noted, the UK's foreign aid policy is not guided solely by any one of humanitarian, economic, or political interests. In other words, the UK takes all of these into account when deciding on the appropriateness and amount of foreign aid (1992: 1311). From this perspective, the bilateral aid that the UK provides to Africa and Asia encompasses all of the interests mentioned above, and its continuation becomes important in this respect.

Explaining the decline in the UK's bilateral development aid from a different perspective can provide valuable insights. At this point, Magdoff's thoughts are important. He is sceptical of bilateral aid agreements. He argues that the economic support provided by developed countries to underdeveloped countries through bilateral aid agreements determines the direction of economic development in these countries and also influences and controls government decisions (2006: 175). From a similar perspective, the UK might benefit more from multilateral aid than bilateral aid to countries where anti-colonial sentiments are more intense. Because, as Seigler points out, multilateral aid reduces the sense of dependency and obligation of developing countries towards developed ones (Seigler, 1969: 33). In this respect, the UK should consider the Commonwealth and the heritage of the British Empire related to the distribution of ODA.

⁸ Considering McKay's statement about Africa that "It is dangerous to generalize about a continent so vast that it could contain within its boundaries all of China, all of the Indian subcontinent, all of the United States and two-thirds of Europe" (1957: 89) it would be wrong to generalize about Africa in particular and Third World countries in general.

⁹ It is essential to recall what Cumming stated in 1996. For him, the future of the UK's "special relationship" with the US was uncertain, and its position within the EU and the integration process was also unclear. Additionally, the UK lacked a firm foundation outside the Commonwealth to sustain its status as a global power. Therefore, it was unlikely that the UK would jeopardize its relations with Africa (1996: 497).

Table 2. The UK's Bilateral ODA: Top 20 Recipient Countries 2015 -2023

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1.	Pakistan	Pakistan	Pakistan	Pakistan	Pakistan	Ethiopia	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Ukraine
2.	Ethiopia	Syria	Nigeria	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Nigeria	Nigeria	Ukraine	Ethiopia
3.	Afghanistan	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Nigeria	Afghanistan	Somalia	Pakistan	Nigeria	Afghanistan
4.	Nigeria	Nigeria	Syria	Afghanistan	Yemen	Afghanistan	Ethiopia	Somalia	Syria
5.	Syria	Afghanistan	Somalia	Syria	Nigeria	Yemen	Yemen	Ethiopia	Yemen
6.	Sierra Leone	Tanzania	Afghanistan	Dem. Rep Congo.	Bangladesh	Bangladesh	South Africa	Yemen	Nigeria
7.	South Sudan	Jordan	Yemen	Somalia	Syria	Pakistan	Somalia	South Sudan	Somalia
8.	Tanzania	South Sudan	Bangladesh	Bangladesh	South Sudan	Syria	South Sudan	Syria	Pakistan
9.	India	Sierra Leone	South Sudan	Yemen	Dem. Rep Congo.	South Sudan	Sudan	Pakistan	Brazil
10.	Bangladesh	Somalia	Tanzania	Tanzania	Somalia	Sudan	Syria	Bangladesh	Bangladesh
11.	Kenya	Bangladesh	Dem. Rep Congo	South Sudan	Uganda	Dem. Rep Congo.	India	Colombia	South Sudan
12.	Dem. Rep Congo	Kenya	Kenya	Jordan	Lebanon	Lebanon	Bangladesh	Mozambique	Sudan
13.	Uganda	Dem. Rep Congo	Uganda	Kenya	Tanzania	Burma (Myanmar)	Dem. Rep Congo	Dem. Rep Congo	Kenya
14.	Somalia	Yemen	Türkiye	Uganda	Kenya	Zimbabwe	Kenya	Burma (Myanmar)	Mozambique
15.	Burma (Myanmar)	Lebanon	Burma (Myanmar)	Burma (Myanmar)	Jordan	Tanzania	Burma (Myanmar)	India	St. Helena
16.	Rwanda	Iraq	Sierra Leone	Lebanon	Burma (Myanmar)	India	Uganda	Kenya	West Bank & Gaza Strip
17.	Lebanon	Uganda	Lebanon	Nepal	India	Kenya	Jordan	Uganda	Dem. Rep Congo
18.	Zimbabwe	Burma (Myanmar)	Nepal	India	Mozambique	Uganda	Tanzania	Jordan	Nepal
19.	Nepal	Nepal	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Nepal	Nepal	St. Helena	Zimbabwe
20.	Malawi	Malawi	India	Sierra Leone	Sudan	Jordan	Lebanon	Zimbabwe	Türkiye

	Former British colony: Yes - Commonwealth member: Yes
	Former British colony: No - Commonwealth member: No
	Former British colony: Yes - Commonwealth member: No
	Former British colony: Yes - Former Commonwealth member: Yes
	Former British colony: Partially - Commonwealth member: No
	Former British colony: No - Commonwealth member: Yes

Source : (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

Commonwealth countries have significantly influenced the UK's foreign aid policy, especially during the Cold War era.¹⁰ In their 1981 articles, Healey and Coverdale responded sarcastically to those who presented this issue as a discovery. For them, it would not be a discovery to suggest that the UK's foreign aid policy is shaped by interests and concerns related to the Commonwealth or former colonies (1981: 127). As stated by Rotarou and Ueta in the Tanzania example, the UK historically directed its aid to its former colonies, such as Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda. This practice demonstrates the UK's policy of preferential treatment for its former colonies in terms of ODA (2009: 167). An analysis of Table 2 reveals that the aid distributed to Commonwealth nations and former colonies shows a similar trend.

In other words, this indicates that the UK continues to prioritize its foreign aid to members of the Commonwealth and the former colonies.

Alesina and Dollar emphasize that political and strategic priorities can strongly influence the allocation of foreign aid. In this context, the relations between the former colonizer and the former colony are also shaped by this aspect. For instance, a former colony that maintains strong political ties with its former colonizer may receive more foreign aid, despite having a poor economy, weak governance, and an undemocratic system. In contrast, a country without a colonial history that has good governance, among other factors, may receive less aid (2000: 33).

Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, as decolonization progressed, the UK's bilateral foreign aid

¹⁰ The UK has historically focused its foreign aid on its former colonies. For example, from 1970 to 1994, 78% of the UK's bilateral aid was allocated to these countries (Alesina & Dollar 2000: 37).

focused on the member states of the Commonwealth. This indicates that the legacy of the British Empire had a notable impact on the allocation of foreign aid (Tomlinson, 2003: 413). When Table 2 is examined, it is evident that only the countries marked in green are neither former British colonies nor members of the Commonwealth. So today, it would not be wrong to state that among the top 20 recipient countries, former colonial ties are particularly important for the UK.

About Table 2, it is essential to highlight that ten countries have consistently appeared on the list from 2015 to 2023. These countries are Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Bangladesh, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo). It is also important to note that Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the DR Congo, and Syria, which are marked in green in the table, did not have a colonial past under the British Empire and are not members of the Commonwealth. This indicates that the priority given to former colonies and Commonwealth countries in the UK's foreign aid continues. However, these four countries are

also vital in showing that the UK's ODA vision extends beyond historical ties. Taking all this into account, it is worth noting that the UK also prioritizes humanitarian crises, civil wars, and development issues in its foreign aid.

Another issue that needs to be explained regarding Table 2 is the different status of India. India holds an interesting position among the countries that receive foreign aid from the UK. Although it has the largest population of poor individuals in the world and faces numerous challenges, the country is also a foreign aid donor. Since the 1950s, India has been a donor country, and in recent years, with the growth of its economy, it has come to be recognized as an "emerging donor" (Mullen, 2012: 154).

In analysing the table below, it is important to consider which countries receive the highest bilateral ODA from the UK. As McLennan emphasized, the UK did not distribute its foreign aid based on data on the development of underdeveloped countries. In other words, this aid was not provided by the UK to the countries that needed it most (1969: 734).

Neither Pakistan nor Ukraine is classified as a Least

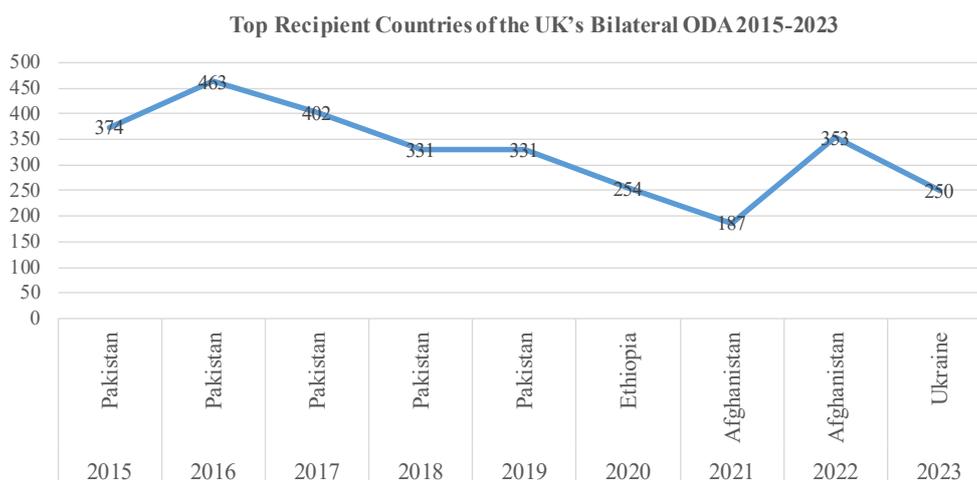


Figure 3. Top Recipient Countries of the UK's Bilateral ODA 2015-2023 (Amount £m).

Source: (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

Developed Country (LDC) by the UN, while Ethiopia and Afghanistan are considered LDC countries (UNCTAD, n.d.). The ODA provided to Pakistan, which has been at the top of this list for five consecutive years, reflects the geopolitical and political significance that the UK attributes to the country. Afghanistan faces challenging living conditions as an LCD. However, it is important to realize that geopolitical and security concerns notably impact the aid provided to this country. Similarly, Ethiopia is experiencing a humanitarian crisis, but it is also considered strategically crucial due to its geopolitical position and the UK's influence in Africa. Ukraine, which was previously not on the list, has started receiving significant aid due to the war with Russia, primarily for security reasons. So, it can be argued that the UK selects the country that receives the most aid, pri-

oritizing its geopolitical, political, and strategic objectives.

When examining LDCs by continent, it is clear that the majority of LDCs are located in Africa, followed by Asia. It is concerning that there has been a notable decrease in the amount of bilateral aid from the UK to both continents. For more information on this issue, please refer to Figure 2.

Recently, the UK's ODA has faced problems concerning its amount, distribution, and overall impact. Thus, the UK must now prioritize allocating its ODA to the world's poorest countries. However, as previously mentioned, Africa's share of the UK's ODA is declining. If the UK does not utilize its ODA for the development of LDCs, it may lose its leadership among donor countries in ODA (Ritchie et al., 2021: 10-11).

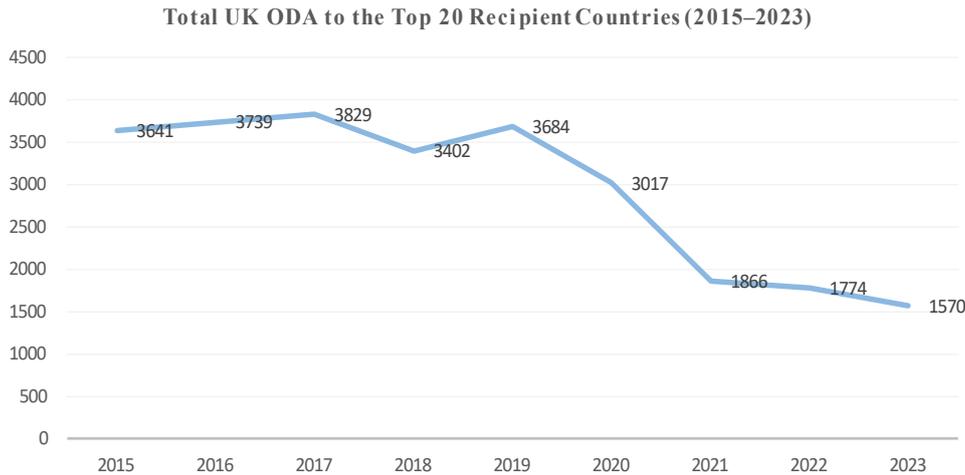


Figure 4. Total UK ODA to the Top 20 Recipient Countries (2015–2023) (Amount £m).

Source: (DFID, 2016; DFID, 2017; DFID, 2018; DFID, 2019; FCDO, 2020; FCDO, 2021; FCDO, 2022; FCDO, 2023a; FCDO, 2024).

The decline in ODA received by the top 20 recipient countries cannot be attributed to a decrease in the UK's ODA budget. On the contrary, the 2023 budget of £15.3 billion surpasses that of 2017, the year in which these countries collectively received the highest total ODA from the UK. Therefore, the decline is best explained by changes in allocation priorities, which have resulted in significantly diminished aid to these 20 countries.

From a similar perspective, the £15.3 billion allocated by the UK for ODA in 2023 can be seen as a notable improvement in the UK's foreign aid position in the post-Brexit period. However, when Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and Tables 1 and 2 are examined together, it becomes clear that the increase in foreign aid is problematic. The problem here, of course, is not the UK's deviation from the UN's 0.7% target, but rather how the UK Governments are using the resources allocated for ODA. One of the most significant issues in this regard, as shown in Table 1, is that the largest share of the ODA budget is allocated to refugees within the UK. In other words, when the government that provides this aid spends it on refugees within its own country, it should not be labeled "development aid" or "foreign aid".

Figure 2 shows that after 2020, bilateral aid to African, Asian, and Pacific countries decreased because a significant portion of the ODA budget was redirected to refugee support within the UK. On the other hand, the UK's resources allocated to countries most in need of ODA assistance have decreased, closely related to greater emphasis on the UK's international security concerns, as indicated in Table 2. These concerns have led to the countries receiving the most aid from the UK being determined not on development grounds but on international security. Consequently, the UK's focus on domestic priorities and international security concerns has led to a reduction in bilateral aid to LDCs.

Although this article mainly covers 2015 to 2023, a statement from UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer in February 2025 is also relevant. In his statement, Starmer announced that the UK would increase defence spending to 2.6% of GDP in 2027, with a further target of 3% in the future. This planned increase in defence expenditure is directly associated with the foreign aid budget. Especially, the Prime Minister indicated that the foreign aid budget would be reduced from 0.5% to 0.3% of GDP to increase defence spending. Previously, the foreign aid budget decreased from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now scheduled to further reduce to 0.3% in 2027 to prioritize defence funding (Loft & Brien, 2025).

4. Thoughts on the UK's Official Development Assistance

The classification of foreign aid, as well as the criteria that determine what qualifies as foreign aid, is complex. To elaborate on this issue, it would be helpful to continue with Morgenthau's foreign aid classification. He identified six different types of foreign aid. According to him, these are: "...humanitarian foreign aid, subsidy foreign aid, military foreign aid, bribery, prestige foreign aid, and foreign aid for economic development." As a key figure in realist international relations theory, he emphasized the political aspect of foreign aid. For him, only humanitarian foreign aid had no inherent political aspect on its own. He also noted that humanitarian foreign aid can serve a political purpose when it operates within a political context (1962: 301). Similarly, Hindley claimed that foreign aid is provided based on interest and political purposes. In his own words: "foreign aid is primarily a tool with which donor governments seek to produce political results of benefit to themselves" (1963: 107).

Although in the previous decades, the UK's bilateral aid was not predominantly designed around humanitarian principles, it did include some humanitarian elements (McKinlay & Little 1978: 331). As can be seen throughout the article, the UK has adopted a humanitarian approach in conjunction with its strategic objectives in foreign aid. While this situation is understandable from a realist international relations perspective, it is problematic in terms of the relationship between foreign aid and development.

As Bearce and Tirone point out, when foreign aid becomes increasingly instrumental for military and strategic purposes, its effectiveness in fostering growth tends to decline. In other words, if Western actors want their foreign aid to support growth in developing countries, they should not use it to achieve their military and strategic goals (2010: 849). It is not easy for the UK to put forward an ODA vision that focuses solely on development, apart from its own strategic goals and the democratic challenges faced by developing countries.

Conservatives and liberals are cautious about providing foreign aid to undemocratic countries, as the leaders of these countries may use aid as a tool to reinforce their authoritarian rule (Goldsmith, 2001: 123). When a country with an undemocratic government receives foreign aid, the expectations over that aid can differ between those oppressed by the regime and those who run the regime. As Tokdemir stated, individuals suffering under a regime that receives foreign aid will blame the donor country for the regime's continued existence. On the other hand, the regime itself may view foreign aid as a form of support that helps maintain its power or status (2017: 829). This situation is also problematic for the donor country's own public opinion.

Donors may face a dilemma when considering cutting foreign aid to oppressive regimes due to human rights violations. If foreign aid is cut off, these regimes may become weaker and respond by increasing violence against their citizens to maintain control. In other words, reducing foreign aid based on human rights issues may exacerbate human rights violations rather than alleviate them, creating a significant dilemma. So, if donor countries continue to provide foreign aid, they indirectly support the regime; however, if they cut off their aid, the public will suffer even more (Nielsen, 2013: 793). Conservative David Cameron stated at the 2011 Commonwealth Summit that the UK should suspend foreign aid to countries with problems such as those related to democracy, human rights, and press freedom. Countries that were threatened with suspension of aid expressed their opposition to this threat (Erkul, 2021b: 354-355).

Here, the UK must recognize that countries receiving aid are usually underdeveloped and may face challenges related to human rights and democracy. Therefore, the UK should not suspend its foreign aid each time a less developed country violates human rights. However, it would be appropriate to cut foreign aid in cases of racism or attempts at genocide.

It is worth noting that donor countries with less democratic accountability and transparency often ignore the economic needs of the majority of the population in underdeveloped countries when providing their foreign aid (Bader & Faust, 2014: 588). From this perspective, it is irrational for the UK to lose influence in the developing world while citing democratic issues, especially when countries like China are strengthening their influence in these countries.

Furthermore, as Winters argued, countries governed by democratic systems and the rule of law are more likely to benefit from foreign aid in terms of economic growth (2010: 238). However, the UK's preferences should not be guided by financial considerations, as this would risk bringing colonial accusations against the UK, as noted earlier.

Summarizing the issue, recommending a reduction/cut in foreign aid to developing countries would be unwise. In many cases, it would be more beneficial to increase aid to these nations. However, foreign aid should be provided more selectively to avoid perpetuating a cycle of mismanagement and economic decline, and it should foster a fair development process. (Bräutigam & Knack, 2004: 256). Additionally, suppose developing countries are confident that the foreign aid they receive will continue for a sufficient period. In that case, it will increase the possibility that foreign aid contributes positively to these countries (Riddell, 1999, p. 332).

Another issue that needs to be discussed under this heading is whether the UK's foreign aid is effective. Since the end of World War II, the provision of foreign aid to developing countries has sparked a discussion between donor and recipient countries. This discussion centered around several key questions: Was the aid used effectively? Did it meet the expectations of the donor countries? Did it hamper the socio-economic development capacity of the recipient countries? (Cohen, 2013: 591). The discussion continued in the post-Cold War period. Moyo states that in the 1990s, the development model based on foreign aid was questioned due to its lack of success. From the perspective of donor countries, despite years of financial assistance, developing countries have not achieved meaningful development,¹¹

¹¹ The idea that increasing foreign aid by developed countries will support economic growth in developing countries is problematic. Viotti and Kauppi believe that the aid provided to underdeveloped countries is often weak in promoting economic growth. They claimed that small amounts of aid tend to be given haphazardly, while larger are frequently squandered due to corruption and poor economic policies. Additionally, the involvement of recipient countries in wars and conflicts undermines all benefits of well-designed foreign aid. In this respect, it is clear that the foreign aid provided by developed countries does not save millions of people from poverty (2014: 425-428).

indicating that this model has been unsuccessful. At the same time, donor countries blamed the leaders of developing countries for the failure of this model (2013: 41).

As Bräutigam and Knack observed nearly twenty years ago, although foreign aid plays a vital role in the economies of many underdeveloped countries in Africa, inadequate institutions, weak legal systems, lack of accountability, strict controls on information flow, and widespread corruption continue to hinder their development (2004: 255). Unfortunately, there is no significant change in this regard today.

Although foreign aid has supported development in some cases, it has worsened the economic circumstances of various countries. For example, some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that receive foreign aid are experiencing increased poverty due to ongoing mismanagement and inadequate financial performance. The poverty observed in this region raises concerns about the effectiveness of foreign aid. However, the solution is not to cut or reduce foreign aid; instead, it should be directed to these countries in a more detailed and selective manner (Graham & O'Hanlon, 1997: 96). In addition to this, Khan and Ahmed emphasize another issue regarding Pakistan. They argue that most of the foreign aid received by Pakistan was allocated to non-development expenditures, and therefore, foreign aid did not significantly impact Pakistan's economic growth (2007: 236). So, this issue is a significant concern for the UK. Providing foreign aid with specific preconditions and requirements can create challenges for the UK, particularly due to its colonial history. Foreign aid typically comes with requirements/conditions that the recipient country must fulfil before support can be granted. Moreover, a lack of trust between donor and recipient countries can lead to stricter requirements, which may minimize the recipient's motivation to comply with these demands. Additionally, political or economic dark that arises during the provision of foreign aid can further complicate compliance with these requirements (Graham & O'Hanlon 1997: 100). This issue may also lead to accusations of colonialism. A quote from Clark emphasizes the accusations of neo-colonialism that the UK faces when providing foreign aid: *"The more gentlemen in Whitehall are frightened by the cry of "neocolonialism," the less anxious they are to push their noses into the affairs of aid-receiving countries..."* (1964: 24).

At this point, the efficient use of foreign aid received by a developing country can be considered a viable alternative for the continuation of foreign aid. In this alternative, the donor of foreign aid does not dictate how the recipient should utilize the funds. Instead, the donor focuses on the outcomes achieved after recipient countries have utilized the aid. In a good example, a country that effectively utilizes the aid will experience its development independent of ex-

ternal plans or pressures from other actors. On the other hand, the donor will have the opportunity to demonstrate to taxpayers that the foreign aid provided has been used effectively (Savedoff, 2015: 316). As far-right sentiment rises in Europe, it is becoming increasingly complex for the UK Government to pursue a foreign aid program that satisfies both recipient countries and taxpayers.

Another issue that deserves examination is the relationship between the UK's foreign aid and its soft power. As Hill and Beadle stated, it is correct to consider soft power as a foreign policy instrument rather than a policy (2014: 12). To use this instrument, an actor must persuade the target country that its objectives are legitimate (Nye, 2005: 12). But unfortunately, the UK's failures in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with its relations with the US, have negatively affected its soft power (Hill & Beadle, 2014: 13).

It is clear that Britain's democratic history, its role in the Industrial Revolution, world-class universities, press and media, global companies and sports clubs, the significance of the English language, the Monarchy, its historical artifacts, and the many individuals from Britain who have influenced science, art, and literature, make it as a cultural superpower (Hill and Beadle, 2014: 23-34). In addition, ethnic and cultural minorities can be considered a source of soft power for a country. The level of integration and the achievements of these minorities contribute positively to the nation's soft power. However, suppose there is an imbalance between ethnic and cultural diversity and the integration of these minorities. In that case, it can harm the country's image and its soft power (Hill & Beadle, 2014: 14). But, although having these features makes the UK an important soft power, it can be argued that issues with foreign aid diminish its potential. Increasing aid to underdeveloped countries would not be the only solution here. The UK's colonial past also presents a challenge in this context. It is also crucial for the UK to collaborate with developing countries to enhance its soft power. Clark emphasized the significance of this collaboration in 1966 as follows:

"At the end of the period of its world-wide imperial responsibilities, Britain is with its allies engaged in another world-wide responsibility, that of economic development of the poorer countries. The major allies in this are not the other rich countries but the developing countries themselves. We recognise that this effort will involve a call on all of our resources during the rest of the century" (1966: 329).

It is also crucial not to present the aid provided to countries as a blessing. Because individuals who hold an anti-colonial perspective do not view Western aid to developing countries as a blessing, a quote from Tinker about Asia may help to clarify this point:

"Another legacy from the colonial period is the conviction that the poverty of Asia is the consequence of exploitation by the West. Hence the belief, shared by many, that the West owes a debt to Asia which can only be repaid by copious material assistance today" (1959: 45).

As stated above, increasing aid to underdeveloped countries would not be enough for the UK. On the other hand, as Hill and Beadle stated, even a slight decline in foreign aid spending could negatively impact a country's soft power (2014:12). In addition, donor countries prioritize becoming the largest donor in a country because this status gives them prestige and important symbolic advantages (Lebovic, 2005: 125). Upon reviewing Figures 1, 2, and Table 1, several issues have been identified that pose important problems for the UK's foreign aid and its soft power:

- In recent years, the UK has not met the 0.7% target, and despite an increase in the amount of ODA, bilateral aid to Africa and Asia has declined.
- In recent years, a significant portion of ODA has been allocated to refugees in the UK.
- The amount of bilateral aid provided to the countries that need it most has been reduced.

It is important to remember that soft power could lead the UK to exaggerate its importance as if the British Empire were still in existence (Hill & Beadle, 2014: 20). From a pragmatic/realistic viewpoint, the UK should prioritize foreign aid more seriously, considering its soft power.

To summarize, Khan, in his 1971 article, identified several challenges faced by the UK in its foreign aid program. These challenges are a limited budget for foreign aid, an uneven geographical distribution of foreign aid, a lack of proper planning for recipient countries, and uncertainty about the purposes of UK foreign aid (1971: 15-16). Given that these challenges remain largely unchanged today, the issue of foreign aid has become more crucial than ever for the UK following its departure from the EU, commonly referred to as Brexit.

5. Conclusions

Due to its colonial past, the issue of foreign aid has emerged as a necessity for the UK. After World War II, it became increasingly important for the UK to provide foreign aid through a formal institutional structure. As decolonization progressed, former colonies/territories became key recipients of foreign aid, and as a result, the Commonwealth gained increased importance. The debate on whether the government should control foreign aid was a concern for both the Conservative and Labour Parties. It is worth noting that the Conservative Party generally supports the idea of government control over the allocation of foreign aid. Currently, the FCDO conti-

nues to distribute the majority of ODA. The FCDO's leading position in the distribution of ODA is significant in demonstrating that the UK uses foreign aid as a tool of its foreign policy.

As detailed in the article, the UK achieved its first-ever ODA target of 0.7% GNI in 2013, and in 2015, the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act guaranteed the 0.7% target. Despite the political instability that followed the Brexit referendum, the UK continued to uphold the 0.7% target. However, the end of the UK's EU membership has brought the UK into a challenging period for ODA.

The problems experienced in the UK's ODA, especially after 2021, should be viewed in conjunction with the political instability resulting from Brexit. Implementing foreign policy strategies that increase the UK's national interests while the country is experiencing internal chaos has been a difficult task. However, this situation is important from a different perspective. While the government was working to develop a global strategy to manage the political instability caused by Brexit, the instability itself was the primary factor that thwarted this effort.

This article focuses on the period from 2015 to 2023. However, it is worth noting that the UK's ODA spending in 2024 was nearly £14 billion, representing an 8% decline compared to 2023. Additionally, the UK's ODA spending, which accounted for 0.58% of its GNI in 2023, decreased to 0.50% in 2024 (FCDO 2025). This decline in both ODA spending and the proportional share strengthened the prediction that challenges related to ODA will continue under the leadership of the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer.

The effective use of ODA by the UK is crucial to the Global Britain strategy. At a time when ODA, in line with the UK's national interests, is vital, rising far-right movements in Europe and the UK are hindering foreign aid. Therefore, ODA is an essential tool in the Global Britain strategy, but it is becoming less significant due to domestic political concerns. It should also be noted that, although the FCDO can evaluate it within the scope of ODA, the largest portion of the aid was spent on refugees within the country by the government.

A possible decision of the UK to discontinue the allocation of ODA for refugees within its own borders will represent a significant step toward addressing challenges associated with foreign aid. As is known, ODA is mainly intended to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. The allocation of the largest portion of the ODA budget to refugees within the UK poses a problem for both bilateral and multilateral aid distribution. Redirecting these funds to support developing countries would address many of the budgetary and distributional problems discussed in the article.

Also, the aid provided to Ukraine after Russia's in-

vasion has reduced the amount of aid to Africa and Asia, which is highly problematic. The inferences emphasized above become clearer when reviewing Figure 2. Additionally, an analysis of Table 2 shows that colonial ties and Commonwealth countries have a significant influence on the UK's foreign aid policy. Considering that more than half of the Commonwealth members are from Africa and Asia, and that the LDCs are predominantly located in these two continents, it is worth noting that the problems experienced in the ODA also pose an important challenge to the effectiveness and continuity of the Commonwealth.

An analysis of the top 20 countries receiving bilateral aid from the UK between 2015 and 2023 shows that the UK's ODA policy contains a range of aspects, including humanitarian, economic, foreign policy, and national security concerns. From a realist perspective, it is unrealistic to expect countries to adopt only a humanitarian approach to their foreign aid policies. On the other hand, an aid policy based on only national interests would also be problematic. In this regard, the UK's ODA policy is appropriate due to its multifaceted design. However, tying aid provision to democratic values could be considered a factor that diminishes the UK's influence in global foreign aid. Staying detached from this approach would enable the UK to compete more effectively with countries like China.

Foreign aid from donor countries is often conditional on national interest. Considering that the DFID and the FCDO are the largest contributors to the UK's ODA budget, it would not be wrong to consider foreign aid as a strategic tool of foreign policy. However, as stated below, the UK must act cautiously in determining the condition of the foreign aid.

Furthermore, as detailed in the article, the UK must avoid being accused of neo-colonialism regarding its ODA. While this task is not easy, the UK should be careful in defining the preconditions for granting foreign aid and must increase the proportion of multilateral aid within ODA. From this perspective, increasing the proportion of multilateral foreign aid within the ODA budget is crucial to counter accusations of colonialism. Furthermore, this policy choice could also enable the UK to enhance its global soft power, a vital component for implementing the Global Britain strategy. If the UK government wants to establish a new global role for its country and create a comprehensive foreign policy strategy, it should recognize the importance of ODA.

As noted in the article, Starmer announced that the foreign aid budget would be reduced from 0.5% to 0.3% of GDP in 2027, in order to increase defense spending. This future plan should be reassessed in light of the UK's national interests, and it should be abandoned. Even if meeting the 0.7% UN target is not feasible in the future, the current ODA budget

should at least be maintained proportionally, or at its current level. Figure 4 clearly demonstrates the decline in foreign aid to the countries most important to the UK. While this needs to be compensated for, further reductions to the ODA budget will exacerbate the problem. Increasing defense spending is undoubtedly important for the UK, given its security challenges in Europe. On the other hand, establishing a new global role, especially after Brexit, is also crucial for the UK's national interests.

The UK government should prioritize ODA as a key tool in the UK's foreign policy, largely setting aside domestic political considerations. Racism and 'Britain First' ideologies have become more prominent within UK politics today. This development may further polarize the public and problematize domestic support for foreign aid to developing countries. The UK government should continue to justify foreign aid based on national interest and refrain from allowing domestic political pressures to undermine this critical policy area.

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