

GEOPOLITICS AND DEMOCRACY

AN INFORMED VIEW

APRIL 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rt Hon the Baroness May of Maidenhead



Former Prime Minister Theresa May served as leader of the United Kingdom from 2016 to 2019. She is the second female in British history to hold the position.

Theresa May served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Leader of the Conservative Party from 2016 to 2019, during an extraordinary time in global affairs. She served as the Member of Parliament for Maidenhead for 27 years. She now sits in the UK House of Lords.

Mrs. May continues to work with over 20 charity and voluntary organizations including the Aldersgate Group, a business organization which champions environmental sustainability and Breakthrough T1D, the type 1 diabetes charity. In 2023 she set up the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking to raise the political momentum of the issue.

This year she was appointed a Senior Fellow at Yale University, teaching on the future of democracy.



At Insight's Summit 2025, former UK prime minister, the Rt Hon the Baroness May of Maidenhead, and Summit attendees participated in a wide-ranging discussion on a range of topics, including geopolitics and the future of democracy. Here are some highlights of the conversation.

GEOPOLITICS

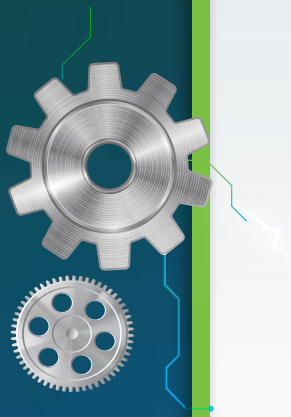
- Uncertainty is the order of the day. In the current environment, it is difficult for businesses to make meaningful decisions about where and how to invest against this backdrop. Rapidly changing decisions around tariffs on US imports are just one example.
- Changes in US policy – such as in aid spending – leave a gap in global leadership. As the current US administration appears to be focused on conducting a series of bilateral deals, China has an opportunity to step up its efforts to influence global affairs. It is notable that while the US is stepping back from encouraging global free trade, Chinese authorities had been advocating for it. Other countries, such as the UK, may also seek to collaborate with others to reinforce Western, democratic values.
- It is now widely acknowledged that NATO countries, aside from the US, are likely to need to spend more on defence, with Europe looking to build its capabilities as quickly as possible to enable defence without dependence on the US. This will take time as it means building manufacturing capacity, though it would be positive for jobs across the UK and Europe. A key question for the UK perhaps is where it will source defence equipment – previously, it has largely sourced this from the US.
- Alternative approaches to or within NATO may need to be considered, such as European nations within NATO acting without the US while maintaining the overall structure of the organisation. However, there are inherent challenges with such an approach. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan was an example of other NATO members' dependence on US air support.



I would argue that the UK, as it has in the past, has the opportunity to play a significant role in trying to shape the new world order.

It's up to all of us who believe in democratic values, in freedom and in the sovereignty of nation states, to stand up and proclaim those values and work to ensure that we maintain those values against that changing world.

RT HON THE BARONESS MAY OF MAIDENHEAD



THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

- Recent election results, such as in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, highlight the ongoing success of 'populist' parties with a focus on single issues. There seems to be an increasing polarisation on key topics, and the historical, multi-lateral rules-based order is fragmenting. A question remains as to whether such trends are driven by beliefs about democracy itself, or whether they highlight the failure of democracy to deliver on its promises.
- Social media has transformed politics today: extreme views that would previously have no traction can now be amplified globally, driving further polarisation. There is also a question around how people can ascertain truth about the world if they are only seeing a feed of views that reinforce their own opinions. The rise of artificial intelligence introduces similar questions: a central focus is whether it is possible to find a framework in which innovation and creativity is possible, while limiting potential harms.



There is a paradox in politics. On the one hand, people say they don't want soundbites – they want to hear how politicians will improve their future. But on the other hand, people don't want to hear it if they think a new approach will cost them more. This is a gap that politicians need to bridge.

RT HON THE BARONESS MAY OF MAIDENHEAD



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